LORIMER
OF THE NORTHWEST

HAROLD BINDLOSS

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Mrs C. L. Dodge

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LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST

We Were in the Cañon, Shooting Down the Mad Rush of a Rapid toward Eternity.—*Page 170.*

Lorimer of the Northwest

By HAROLD BINDLOSS

Author of By Right of Purchase, Etc.

With Frontispiece By
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LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST

PROLOGUE

FAIRMEAD, WESTERN CANADA.

IT is a still, hot day in autumn, and there is a droning of mosquitoes where I sit by an open window, glancing alternately out across the Assiniboian prairie and somewhat blankly at the bundle of paper before me, ready to begin this story. Its telling will not be an easy matter, but one finds idle hours pass heavily after a life such as mine has been, and since the bronco blundering into a badger-hole fell and broke my leg the surgeon who rode forty miles to set it said that if I was to work at harvest I must not move before — and the harvest is already near. So I nibble the pen and look around the long match-boarded hall, waiting for the inspiration which is strangely slow in coming, while my wife, who was Grace Carrington, smiles over her sewing and suggests that it is high time to begin.

There are many guns on the wall glistening like sardines with oil rubbed well in, and among them the old Winchester which once saved us from starvation in British Columbia. There are also long rows of painted butterflies and moths whose colors pleased Grace's fancy when I caught them in the sloos. Sometimes I wonder whether she really likes that kind of decoration, or merely pinned them to the wall because I caught them for her. Then, and this is my own fancy, the bit of the horse which once saved her life hangs in a place of its own under the heads of the antelopes and the forward half of a crane with which a Winnipeg taxidermist has travestied nature. There are also a few oil paintings and, of course, some furniture, but I

am not learned in such matters, and know only that it cost me many dollars when I brought it from Toronto on one of Grace's birthdays, and I have never regretted the investment.

No, there is nothing here that merits much comment, though Fairmead is one of the finest homesteads between the Saskatchewan and the Souris. Then as I gaze with half-closed eyes through the open window the memories awaken and crowd, as it were, upon one another. Far out on the rim of the prairie lies a silvery haze, through which the vault of azure melts into the dusty whiteness of the grasses. Then, level on level, with each slowly swelling rise growing sharper under that crystalline atmosphere the prairie rolls in, broken here by a willow copse and there by a straggling birch bluff, while a belt of cool neutral shadow marks the course of a deep-sunk ravine. At first sight it is all one glaring sweep of white and gray, but on looking closer with understanding eyes one sees the yellow and sage-green of tall reeds in a sloo, the glowing lights of sun-bleached buffalo bones, and a mingling of many colors where there is wild peppermint or flowers among the grass. Then, broad across the foreground, growing tall and green in a few moister places, and in others changing to ochre and coppery red, there ripples, acre after acre, a great sea of grain whose extent is beyond the comprehension of the insular Briton.

That, at least, with its feathery oat tassels and stately heads of wheat, is a picture well worth looking upon, for there are few places in the world where one may see furrows of equal length. It was won hardly, by much privation, and in the sweat of the brow, as well as by the favor of Providence, as Grace would say, and she is right in most things, except when she attempts to instruct me in stock feeding, for we hold on the prairie that it is not fair

to place all the burden on Providence. Therefore the settlers who succeed cut down rations and work double tides to help themselves in time of adversity.

Yes, though better men have done more and failed, we worked hard enough for it, Harry Lorraine and I, stinting ourselves often to feed the stock and deal justly with the soil, until at last the ill-fortune turned and the kindly earth repaid us a hundred fold for our trust in it.

Grace partly approves of the foregoing, for she laid by her sewing to read the loose sheets beside me, bending down until her hair, which is bronze-gold with the sun in it, just touched my own. It may be that my eyes are prejudiced, but I have never seen a woman who might compare with her. Neither has her comeliness faded. Instead, it has grown even more refined and stately, for Grace had always a queenly way, since the day when I first met her, the fairest maid — I think so now, though it is long ago — that ever trod the bleak moorlands of eastern Lancashire.

Beyond the wheat and straggling birches I can see the shingled roofs of Harry's dwelling. We have long been partners — all the Winnipeg dealers know the firm of Lorimer & Lorraine, and how they send their wheat in by special freight train. Then there is a stretch of raw breaking, and the tinkle of the binders rises out of a hidden hollow, as tireless arms of wood and steel pile up the sheaves of Jasper's crop — Jasper takes a special pride in forestalling us. The dun smoke of a smudge-fire shows that Harry is in prairie fashion protecting our stock, and I see it drifting eastward across the dusty plain, with the cattle seeking shelter from the mosquitoes under it.

The management of a farm like Fairmead is a serious task, even when there are two to do it, and Grace says there are weighty responsibilities attached. How many toilers in crowded Europe benefit by the cheap flour we send them

I do not know, though last year we kept the Winnipeg millers busy; but when, in conjunction with a certain society, we opened new lands and homes for the homeless poor — it was Grace's pet project — all those who occupied them were not thankful. Some also stole their neighbors' chickens, and the said neighbors abused us. Others seemed more inclined to live on one another than to wrest a living from the soil, while once Macdonald of the Northwest Police lodged a solemn protest, "We'll hold ye baith responsible for the depredations o' the wastrels who're disturbing the harmony o' this peaceful prairie."

Still, Harry and I were once poor enough ourselves, and with Grace's help we have done our best to weed out the worthless — Harry attends to this — and encourage the rest. Very many bushels of seed-wheat has Grace given them, and here as elsewhere there are considerably more good than bad, while already a certain society takes to itself the credit of the flourishing Fairmead colony. Harry, however, says that undeserved prosperity has made me an optimist. But the reader will wonder how I, Ralph Lorimer, who landed in Canada with one hundred pounds' capital, became owner of Fairmead and married Grace, only daughter and heiress of Colonel Carrington. Well, that is a long story, and looking back at the beginning of it instead of at the sunlit prairie I see a grimy smoke-blackened land where gaunt chimneys stand in rows, and behind it the bare moors of Lancashire. Then again the memories change like the glasses of a kaleidoscope, and I sigh as I remember comrades who helped us in our necessity and who now, forgotten by all save a few, sleep among the snow-bound ranges, under the bitter alkali dust, and deep in the smoking cañons through which we carried the new steel highway.

Failures, probably their friends called them at home, but in this their friends were wrong. With light jest, or grim

silent endurance, they played out the lost game to the bitter end, and laid the foundations of a great country's prosperity, while if fate or fortune has favors for but the few, those who receive them should remember with becoming humility what otherwise they might have been. So the past comes back, struggle, disappointment, and slow success, at last, until it is a relief when Harry Lorraine strides laughing in and Grace fills for him a great polished horn of cider.

"Here's success to your story! Tell them simply how we live and work, and some of us, the best, have died in this land," he says. Then he raises the horn high toward the rafters and I know his meaning. It is a way the forerunners of civilization — axe-man, paddle-man, and railroad shoveler — had, and he did it in memory of one who lies far off among the northern snows. Taking up the weary pen as he and Grace go out together I prepare to follow his counsel, telling the story simply and as it happened from the beginning.

LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST

CHAPTER I

THE FIRST SOWING

IT was late in autumn, and the heather had faded into dingy brown, though long streaks of golden fern crept winding down, when Grace Carrington first talked with me of the Canadian Dominion on the bleak slopes of Starcross Moor. There was a hollow in the hillside where a few pale-stemmed birches and somber firs formed, as it were, a rampart between the poor, climbing meadows and the waste of gorse and fern, and we two beneath them seemed utterly alone in the moorland solitude.

Grace sat on a lichened boulder with the sunlight upon her, gazing down across the levels of Lancashire. I was just twenty years old, and she seemed the incarnation of all that was fresh and good in early womanhood. Still, it was not only her beauty that attracted me, though she was the well-dowered daughter of a race which has long been famous for fair women, but a certain grave dignity that made her softly spoken wishes seem commands that it would be a pleasure to obey. Grace was nineteen then, and she lived in Western Canada with her widowed father, Colonel Carrington, who had made himself a power in that country. Yet she was English by birth and early training, of the

fair-haired, gray-eyed, old Lancashire stock, and had lost nothing by her sojourn on the prairie as youthful mistress of Carrington Manor.

The land which ran west before us was not a pleasant one. Across its horizon hung a pall of factory smoke; and unlovely hamlets, each with its gaunt pit-head gear and stark brick chimney, sprinkled the bare fields between, for hedgerows were scanty and fences of rusty colliery rope replaced them. Yet it was a wealthy country, and bred keen-witted, enterprising men, who, uncouth often in speech and exterior, possessed an energy that has spread their commerce to the far corners of the earth. That day the autumn haze wrapped a mellow dimness round its defects, but Grace Carrington sighed as she turned toward me.

"I shall not be sorry to go home again," she said. "Perhaps I miss our clear sunshine, but here everyone looks careworn in your dingy towns, and there are so many poor. Besides, the monotony of those endless smoky streets oppresses me. No, I should not care to come back to Lancashire."

Now, the words of a young and winsome woman seldom fall lightly on the ears of a young man, and Grace spoke without affectation as one accustomed to be listened to, which was hardly surprising in the heiress of Carrington. As it happened, they wakened an answering echo within me. The love of the open sky had been handed down to me through long generations of a yeoman ancestry, and yet fate had apparently decreed that I should earn my bread in the counting-house of a cotton-mill. It is probable that I should have been abashed and awkward before this patrician damsel in a drawing-room, but here, under the blue lift, with the brown double-barrel — it was my uncle's new hammerless — across my knees, and the speckled birds beneath, I felt in harmony with the surroundings, and accord-

ingly at ease. I was born and bred under the other edge of the moor.

"It does not always rain here, though this has been a wet season, and trade is bad," I said. "Will you tell me about Canada, Miss Carrington?"

Her eyes brightened as she answered: "It is my adopted country, and I love it. Still it is no place for the weak and idle, for as they say out there, we have no room for any but live men and strong. Yet, I never saw a ragged woman nor heard of a hungry child. All summer the settlers work from dawn to dusk under the clear sunshine of the open prairie, paying rent to no one, for each tills his own land, and though there are drawbacks — drought, hail, and harvest-frost — they meet them lightly, for you see neither anxious faces nor bent shoulders there. Our people walk upright, as becomes free men. Then, through the long winter, when the snow lies firm and white, and the wheat crop has been hauled in, you can hear the jingling sleigh teams flit across the prairie from homestead to homestead under the cloudless blue. The settlers enjoy themselves when their work is done — and we have no drunkenness."

She ceased, turning an eager face toward me, and I felt an old longing increase. It was the inborn love of a fertile soil — and that wide sunlit country seemed to call me, for my father had been the last of a long family to hold one of the extensive farms which with their crumbling feudal halls may yet be found in the remoter corners of Lancashire. Then, asking practical questions, I wondered as Grace Carrington answered, because, though she wore the stamp of refinement to her finger-tips, she knew all that concerned the feeding of stock, and the number of bushels that might be thrashed from an acre of wheat. I knew she spoke as one having experience, for I had been taught to till the soil, and only entered the cotton-mill when on my father's

death it was found that his weakness for horses and his unlucky experiments had rendered it impossible that I should carry on the farm. So, while unobserved the sun sank low, I listened eagerly; until at last there was a sound of footsteps among the fern, and she ceased, after a glance at her watch. But, like the grain she spoke of, drilled into the black Assiniboian loam, the seed had been sown, and in due time the crop would ripen to maturity.

A man came out from the birches, a handsome man, glancing about him with a look of indolent good humor on his face, and though for a moment Grace Carrington seemed displeased, she showed no sign of it as she rose leisurely to meet him.

"I am sorry you had to come in seach of me, Geoffrey," she said; "this is Mr. Lorimer — Captain Ormond. I think you have met before. I lost my way, and he kindly brought me across the moor. I have been telling him about Canada."

The newcomer bowed with an easy indifference, for which, not knowing exactly why, I disliked him, as he said, "Don't remember that pleasure — meet so many people! Canada must be a very nice place; been thinking of going out there myself — drive oxen, grow potatoes, and that kind of thing, you know."

He glanced at Grace, as though seeking her approval of such an act of self-sacrifice; but the girl laughed frankly as she answered, "I can't fancy you tramping behind the plow in a jacket patched with flour-bags, Geoffrey;" while, feeling myself overlooked, and not knowing what to say, I raised my cap and awkwardly turned away. Still, looking back, I caught the waft of a light dress among the fern, and frowned as the sound of laughter came down the wind. These people had been making merry, I thought, at my

expense, though I had fancied Miss Carrington incapable of such ungenerous conduct.

In this, however, I misjudged her, for long afterward I learned that Grace was laughing at the stories her companion told of his strange experiences with sundry recruits, until presently the latter said:

"She stoops to conquer, even a raw Lancashire lad. I congratulate you on your judgment, Gracie. There is something in that untrained cub — could recognize it by the steady, disapproving way he looked at me; but I am some kind of a relative, which is presumably a warrant for impertinence."

Now a saving sense of humor tempered Miss Carrington's seriousness, and Geoffrey Ormond joined in her merry laugh. In spite of his love of ease and frivolous badinage, he was, as I was to learn some day, considerably less of a good-natured fool than it occasionally pleased him to appear to be.

Meantime, I strode homeward with the fierce longing growing stronger. I hated the dingy office where I sat under a gas-jet making up the count of yarn; and yet four weary years I had labored there, partly because I had to earn my bread and because my uncle and sole guardian greatly desired I should. It grew dark as I entered the valley which led to his house, for the cotton-spinner now lived ten miles by rail from his mill, and the sighing of the pine branches under a cold breeze served to increase my restlessness. So it was with a sense of relief that I found my cousin Alice waiting in a cosy corner of the fire-lit drawing-room. We had known each other from childhood, and, though for that very reason this is not always the case, we were the best of friends. She would be rich some day, so the men I met in her father's business said; but if Alice Lorimer ever

remembered the fact, it made but little difference to her. She was delicate, slight, and homely, with a fund of shrewd common-sense and a very kindly heart, whose thoughts, however, she did not always reveal. Now she sat on a lounge before the fire, with the soft light of a colored lamp falling upon her, while a great embroidered screen shut off the rest of the partly-darkened room.

"I have been waiting for you with the tea so patiently, Ralph," she said. "You look tired and moody — you have been out on the moors too long. See, here is a low chair ready just inside the screen, and here is the tea. Sit down and tell me what is troubling you."

I settled myself in the corner, and answered, looking into the fire:

"You were always kind to me, Alice, and one can talk to you. Something made me unsettled to-day, and I didn't care about the birds, though I got a plump brace for you. Alice, I can't help thinking that these brief holidays, though they are like a glimpse of Paradise after my dingy rooms in that sickening town, are not good for me. I am only a poor clerk in your father's mill, and such things as guns and horses are out of my sphere. They only stir up useless longings. So I return on Monday, and hardly think that I shall come back for a long time."

Alice laughed softly, for she was a shrewd young person, then she laid her little hand restrainingly on my arm, before she said:

"And who has a better right to the bay horse and the new hammerless ejector than the nephew of the man who never uses them? Now, I'm guessing at a secret, but it's probable that your uncle bought that gun especially for you. Ralph, you are getting morbid — and you have not been shooting all day. Did you meet Miss Carrington on the moor again?"

Now in such matters I was generally a blunderer; yet something warned me that my answer would displease her. I could, however, see no way of avoiding it, and when I said as unconcernedly as I could, "Yes, and talked to her about Canada!" Alice for no particular reason stooped and dropped a thread into the fire. Then lifting her head she looked at me steadily when I continued, with some hesitation:

"You know how I was always taught that in due time I should work the lands of Lindale Hall, and how, when we found on my father's death that there was nothing left, I tried the cotton-mill. Well, after four years' trial I like it worse than I did at the beginning, and now I feel that I must give it up. I am going back to the soil again, even if it is across the sea."

Alice made no answer for a few moments; then she said slowly: "Ralph you will not be rash; think it over well. Now tell me if you have any definite plans — you know how I always used to advise you?"

I felt I needed sympathy, and Alice was a faithful confidant, so I opened my heart to her, and she listened with patient interest. It seemed to me that my cousin had never looked so winsome as she sat close beside me with a slight flush of color in her usually pale face where the soft lamplight touched it. So we sat and talked until Martin Lorimer entered unobserved, and when, on hearing a footstep, I looked up I saw that he was smiling with what seemed grim approval as his eyes rested on us, and this puzzled me. Then his daughter started almost guiltily as he said, "I wondered where you two were. Dinner has been waiting, and you never heard the bell."

I retired early that night, and, being young, forgot my perplexities in heavy slumber. The next morning I noticed that Alice's eyes seemed heavy, and I wondered what

could be the reason. In after years I mentioned it when Grace and I were talking about old times together, but she only smiled gravely, and said, "I sometimes think your cousin was too good for this world."

The next day was one of those wet Sundays which it is hard to forget. The bleak moor was lost in vapor, and a pitiless drizzle came slanting down the valley, while the raw air seemed filled with falling leaves. A prosperous man with a good conscience may make light of such things, but they leave their own impression on the poor and anxious; so, divided between two courses, I wandered up and down, finding rest nowhere until I chanced upon a large new atlas in my uncle's library. Martin Lorimer was proud of his library. He was a well-read man, though like others of his kind he made no pretense at scholarship, and used the broad, burring dialect when he spoke in his mill. Here I found occupation studying the Dominion of Canada, especially the prairie territories, and lost myself in dreams of half-mile furrows and a day's ride straight as the crow flies across a cattle run, all of which, though I scarcely dared hope it then, came true in its own appointed time.

My uncle had ridden out early, for he was to take part in the new mayor's state visit to church in the manufacturing town, and even Alice seemed out of spirits, so when I left the library there was the weary afternoon to be dragged through somehow. It passed very slowly, and then as I stood by the stables a man from the house at the further end of the valley, where Colonel Carrington was staying, said to our stable lad:

"I mun hurry back. Our folks are wantin' t' horses; maister an' t' Colonel's daughter's going to the church parade. They're sayin' it's a grand turnout, wi' t' firemen, bands, an' t' volunteers, in big brass helmets!"

Neither of them saw me, and presently calling the lad I bade him put the bay horse into the dog-cart.

"He's in a gradely bad temper," said the lad doubtfully. "Not done nothink but eat for a long time now, an' he nearly bit a piece out of me; I wish t' maister would shoot him."

I laughed at the warning, though I had occasion to remember it, and looking for Alice I said, "I am driving in to church to-night. Would you like to come with me?"

Now Alice Lorimer possessed her father's keen perception, and when he kept his temper he was perhaps the shrewdest man I ever met; so when she looked me straight in the face I dropped my eyes, because I really was not anxious for her company, and should not have gone except in the hope of seeing Grace Carrington.

"Have you turned religious suddenly, Ralph?" she asked. "Or have you forgotten you told me yesterday that you did not care to go?"

I made some awkward answer, but Alice smiled dryly, and with a solemn courtesy said:

"Two are company, three are none. Cousin Ralph, I will not go with you. But don't leave the dog-cart behind and come back with the shafts."

I went out with a flushed face, and a sense of relief, angry, nevertheless, that she should read my inmost thoughts, having fancied that my invitation was a stroke of diplomacy. I learned afterward that diplomacy is a mistake for the simple man. With a straightforward "Yes" or "No" he can often turn aside the schemes of the cunning, but on forsaking these he generally finds the other side considerably too clever for him — all of which is a wanton digression from the story.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH PARADE

IT was raining hard when I climbed into the dog-cart and rattled away into the darkness, while somewhat to my surprise Robert the Devil, or Devilish Bob, as those who had the care of him called the bay horse, played no antics on the outward journey, which was safely accomplished. So leaving him at the venerable "Swan," I hurried through the miry streets toward the church. They were thronged with pale-faced men and women who had sweated out their vigor in the glare of red furnace, dye-shop, and humming mill, but there was no lack of enthusiasm. I do not think there are any cities in the world with the same public spirit and pride in local customs that one may find in the grimy towns of Lancashire. The enthusiasm is, however, part of their inhabitants' nature, and has nothing to do with the dismal surroundings.

A haze of smoke had mingled with the rain; yellow gas jets blinked through it, though it would not be dark for an hour or so yet; and the grim, smoke-blackened houses seemed trickling with water. Still every one laughed and chattered with good-humored expectancy, even the many who had no umbrellas. It was hard work to reach the church, though I opined that all the multitude did not intend to venture within, and when once I saw my uncle with a wand in his hand I carefully avoided him. Martin Lorimer was a power and well liked in that town, but I had not driven ten miles to assist him. Then I waited

among the jostling crowd in a fever of impatience, wondering whether Miss Carrington had yet gone in, until at last I saw the Colonel marching through the throng, which — and knowing the temperament of our people I wondered at it — made way for him. There were others of the party behind, and my heart leaped at the sight of Grace. She was walking beside Captain Ormond, who smiled down at her.

Then, just as the Colonel passed within, a burst of cheering broke out, and in the mad scramble for the entrance Grace, who turned a moment to recover the cloak she dropped, was separated from her companion. He was driven forward in the thickest part of the stream of excited human beings, and fortune had signally favored me. Squeezing through from behind a pillar I reached her side, and grew hot with pride when she slipped her arm through mine, and we were borne forward irresistibly by the surging crowd. Once I saw Ormond vainly trying to make his way back in search of his companion, and I stood so that he could not see her. Half-way down the aisle we met an official who recognized me as a nephew of Martin Lorimer. "I'll find you and the lady seats in the chancel. It will be the only good place left," he said.

I did not care where we went, as long as Grace went with me, and when he ensconced us under an oaken canopy among the ancient carved stalls I longed that the service might last a century, while Grace's quiet "Thank you, I am so interested," filled me with ecstasy.

The church was interesting. There are many cathedrals that could not compare with it; and it was very old. The damp haze had entered the building, and obscuring half the clearstory it enhanced its stateliness, for the great carved pillars and arches led the wandering eye aloft and lost it in a mystery, while far up at the western end above the organ a gilded Gloria caught a stray shaft of light

and blazed out of the gloom. I saw Grace's eyes rest on it, and then I followed them down across the sea of faces, along the quaint escutcheons, and over two marble tombs, until she fixed them on her father, who with his party sat in a high-backed pew. The crash of music outside ceased, and with a steady tramp of feet, file by file, men in scarlet uniform moved up the aisle; while before them, led by the sword and gilded mace, came a little homely man, who seemed burdened by his glittering chain, and most uncomfortable. As I knew, he commenced his business career with ten pounds' capital, and could hardly speak plain English, while now his goods were known in every bazaar from Cairo to Singapore. This knowledge fostered a vague but daring hope within me.

I remember little of the service beyond Grace's voice ringing high and clear in the "Magnificat," while for perhaps the first time I caught a glimmer of its full significance, and her face, clean-cut against the shadow where a fretted pinnacle allowed one shaft of light to pass it, looking, I thought, like that of a haloed saint. The rest was all a blurred impression of rolling music, half-seen faces, and gay uniforms, until a tall old man of commanding personality stood high aloft in the carved pulpit, and proclaimed a doctrine that seemed strangely out of place in the busy town. Honest labor brought its own reward in the joy of diligent toil, he said, and the prize of fame or money was a much slighter thing. I could not quite understand this then, for there were many in that district whose daily toil wore body and soul away, so that none of them might hope to live out half of man's allotted span, while a prize for which I would have given my life sat close beside me, and twice that evening the calm proud eyes had smiled gratefully into mine.

Still, there was one drawback. As chance would have it, Minnie Lee, who operated the typewriter in the mill

offices, sat just opposite, and would cast mischievous glances toward me. We were good friends in a way, for during two years I had talked to her on business matters every day, and sometimes also indulged in innocent badinage. She was fair-haired and delicately pretty, and was said to be aware of it; but now of all times I did not want those playful smiles directed toward me. However, I hoped that Grace did not see them; and not knowing what else to do, for I could not frown at her, I sought refuge in what proved to be a bewildering chapter of genealogy, until the building trembled as the vast assembly joined in the closing hymn. Long afterward, out on the lone prairie when the stars shone down through the bitter frost, I could hear in fancy Grace's voice rising beside me through the great waves of sound. Then I would remember the song of the speckled thrush singing at sunset after a showery April day through the shadow of a copse.

We reached the street safely, though in that press there was no hope of finding Colonel Carrington, even if I wished it, which I certainly did not, so after some demur and the discussing of other expedients, Grace accepted my offer to drive her home. "I am afraid it can't be helped," she said, I thought with quite unnecessary cruelty.

The dog-cart was ready, and Robert the Devil went well. The long streets rolled behind us, and were lost in the rain; then with a rhythmic drumming of hoofs and a constant splashing from under the whirring wheels, we swept out into the blackness of a treeless plain. I knew the road and did not take the shortest one; and it was rapture to draw the rugs and apron round Grace's waist, and feel the soft furs she wore brushing against me. The ten miles passed in what seemed to be scarcely as many minutes, and the rush through the damp air — for the rain had ceased at last — raised my companion's spirits, and she

chatted merrily; then, just as we reached the crest of a steep dip into the Starcross valley, the Devil must take fright at a colored railway light that he had often seen before.

I knew we were in for a struggle, and got both hands on the reins; but two men would hardly have held him. The next moment, with a mad rattle of wheels and red sparks flashing under the battering hoofs, we went flying into the long dark hollow, while I think I prayed that the Devil might keep his footing on the loose stones of a very bad road. One lurch flung Grace against the guard-rail, the next against my shoulder, and I remember feeling when the little hand fastened on my arm, that I would gladly have done battle with ten wild horses were she also not in jeopardy. Fresh drizzle lashed our faces, the wind screamed past, the wheels seemed to leave the ground alternately, and a light rushed up toward us from below, while with my teeth hard set I wondered what would happen when we reached the sharp bend at the bottom.

I got the Devil around it somehow, and then breathed easier, for the steep slope of Starcross Brow rose close ahead, and I knew no horse was ever foaled which could run away up that. So, trusting to one hand, I slipped my arm round Grace's waist, and, thrilled at the touch of her damp hair on my neck, "I'll hold you safe; we are near the end, and the danger will soon be past," I said.

It turned out so, for though Robert the Devil charged the hill gallantly, Starcross Brow proved too much for him, and, with a sigh of relief, Grace drew herself away. "I must thank you, Mr. Lorimer. You drive well," she said.

Then I thought that if she had been like Minnie, or even cousin Alice, I might have ventured to replace the protecting arm, but there was something about Grace Carrington that made one treat her, as it were, with reverence. When we drew up in front of Starcross House a carriage

with flashing lamps stood in the drive; I had seen those lights coming down the opposite side of the valley. After Grace had thanked me with a quiet friendliness as I helped her down, a group turned to meet us at the door. The first was a tall, thin-faced man of commanding presence with a long gray moustache, and he stared hard at me with a haughtiness that I fancied was tinctured with contempt, while Captain Ormond stood behind him, smiling languidly and lifted a warning finger unobserved to Grace. There was something forbidding about Colonel Carrington, and to the last few men liked him. I remember Harry Lorraine once comparing him to Coriolanus—"Steeped in pride to the backbone," said Harry, "but it's a clean pride, and there's a good deal of backbone about him."

"I am glad to see you safe, Grace," he commenced. "We were rather anxious about you. But where have you been, and how did we pass you?"

I never saw Grace either confused or taken by surprise, and when she explained quietly her father looked down at me from the top step as he said, "I thank you, sir, but I did not catch the name. May I ask who it is to whom we are so much indebted? Neither do I quite understand yet how we got here before you."

There was nothing in the words, but the glance and tone conveyed the idea that he regretted the debt, while the whimsical look on Ormond's face aided in stirring me, for we had democratic notions in that part of Lancashire.

"Ralph Lorimer, assistant cashier in the Orb Mill," I said. "It was a slight service, and I did not consider the shortest way best;" while before the Colonel could answer I raised my hat to Grace, and, taking Robert the Devil's head, turned him sharply around. Still, as I climbed into the dog-cart I saw that the burly master of Starcross House was chuckling at something, and I drove away feeling

strangely satisfied with myself, until I began to wonder whether after all to walk twice off the field defiantly before the enemy was not another form of cowardice. Alice met me on the threshold — for she heard the wheels — with a query as to why the Satanic Robert was in such a state; but for several reasons I did not fully enlighten her.

My uncle did not return that night, and I left for town the next morning. In the afternoon I sought an interview with him in his private office. It was with some trepidation that I entered, because Martin Lorimer was frank of speech and quick in temper, and I knew he was then busy with the details of a scheme that might double the output of his mill. He thrust the papers away and leaned forward on his desk, a characteristic specimen of his race, square in jaw and shoulder, with keenness and power stamped on his wrinkled face.

"Well, Ralph, what is it now?" he asked. "Johnson of Starcross has been telling me some tale about your running away with an heiress and giving his answer to Colonel Carrington. I'm not altogether sorry. I do not like that man. There is also a reason why he doesn't like me."

"It has nothing to do with that, sir," I answered awkwardly. "You know I have never asked questions about the family money; and you have been very kind to me. But the fact is I can't stand the mill, and I'm thinking of asking for whatever remains of my share and going out to Canada."

Martin Lorimer smote the desk suddenly with his fist, and there was angry bewilderment in his eyes.

"Hast gone mad altogether, lad?" he asked.

I met his gaze steadily. "No," I answered. "I can't help longing for a life in the open air; and there is room in Canada for poor people like me."

Then, thrusting his square jaw forward, he said: "Thy father left four hundred pounds in all. It is now five, under

my stewardship. Shall I ask the cashier to make out a statement? Thy father had whims and fancies, or it would have been four thousand. Tom Lorimer could never see which side of his bread was buttered. He was born a fool, like thee."

Flinging back my head I rose facing him. But he thundered, "Stop! You ought to know my meaning. He was an open-handed gentleman, and my well-loved brother. If you take your share of the five hundred, what is going to educate your brother Reggie and your sister Aline? I presume you know the fees they charge at both those schools? And did you ever ask whether I had plans for thee?"

I was silent a moment. For the first time it struck me with sudden shame that Martin Lorimer had already most generously done his best to start his brother's orphans well in life. Then I answered slowly:

"I beg your pardon. I recognize your goodness; but I know I should never be successful in the mill. I'm sorry, but that is only the simple truth. Let Reggie and Aline keep all, except enough for a third-class passage to Winnipeg. This is not a rash whim. It has taken me three years to make up my mind."

"Then there's an end of the matter," said Martin Lorimer. "Stubbornness is in the family, and you are your father's son. An archangel would hardly have moved poor Tom! Well, lad, you shall not go penniless, nor third-class, if it's only for the credit of the name; and you can't go until spring. I thank thee for telling me; but I'm busy, and we'll talk again. Hast told thy cousin Alice about it?"

His eyes had lost their angry flash before I went out, and something in his change of tone revealed the hard bargain-maker's inner self.

Minnie Lee smiled over the typewriter as I passed her room, and I went in to tell her about it. I felt I must talk

to some one; and, if not gifted with much sense, she was a sympathetic girl. She listened with a pretty air of dismay, and said petulantly, "So I shall lose my only friend in this dreary mill! Don't they pay high wages for my work in Montreal and Winnipeg? Well, if you hear of a situation you can send straight back for me."

Then a door slammed, and I saw a frown on my uncle's face as, perhaps attracted by the sound of voices, he glanced into the room on passing. Still, it was some time afterward before I learned that he had heard the last words; and, remembering them eventually when recalled by events, Minnie's careless speech proved an unfortunate one for both of us.

CHAPTER III

"THE LAND OF PROMISE"

IT was a dismal afternoon in early spring when I lounged disconsolately about the streets of Winnipeg. The prairie metropolis had not then attained its present magnitude, but it was busy and muddy enough; for when the thaw comes the mire of a Western town is indescribable. Also odd showers of wet snow came down, and I shivered under my new skin coat, envying the busy citizens who, with fur caps drawn low down, hurried to and fro. One and all wore the stamp of prosperity, and their voices had a cheerful ring that grated on me, for I of all that bustling crowd seemed idle and without a purpose. So, feeling utterly forlorn, a stranger in a very strange and, at first sight, a forbidding land, I trudged up and down, waiting for the evening train which was to bear me west, and pondering over all that had happened during the past few weeks.

There was the parting with my uncle, who laid a strong hand on my shoulder and lapsed into the speech of the country as he said, "I need not tell thee to set thy teeth and hang on through the first few years, lad. Thy father played out a losing game only too staunchly; and it's stey work at the beginning. I mind when I started the mill — but that's an old story. It's the man who can grin and bear it, coming up smiling after each fall, who wins in the end. And thou hast all the world before thee. Still, remember there are staunch friends behind thee here in Lancashire."

I think his fingers shook a little, but Martin Lorimer was not addicted to much display of sentiment, and with a cough he hurried away; though I remember that the old cashier, who had served him since he started, putting a sealed envelope in my hand, said:

"It's a draft for one hundred pounds on the Bank of Montreal, and it's a secret; but I'm not debiting the estate with it. Thou'rt a gradely fool for thy trouble, Ralph Lorimer. But I knew thy father, and, like him, thou mun go thy own way. Well, maybe it's for the best; and good luck go with thee."

Next came my farewell from cousin Alice, who blushed as, laying before me a fine Winchester repeating rifle, which must have cost her some trouble to obtain in England then, she said:

"It's only a little keepsake, but I thought you would like it — and you will remember your cousin when you use it. Ralph, you have chosen to work out your own destiny, and for many a night your uncle fumed over it until at last he said that the child who fought for scraps in the gutter grew to be worth any two of the spoon-fed. You know how fond he is of forcible simile, and he frowned when I suggested that Canada was not a gutter. Still, it is too late to consider whether you did well, and I ask, as a last favor, if you are ever unfortunate, if only for the sake of old times, you will let us know. And now I wish you all prosperity. Good-bye, Ralph dear, and God bless you."

Her eyes were dim, and she looked so small and fragile that I stooped and kissed her, while though she drew herself suddenly away with the crimson mantling upward from her neck, I felt that whatever happened I had a friend for life in Alice Lorimer.

Now all of that had faded into the past that I had left behind across the sea, and henceforward I knew there must

be no more glancing back. I had chosen my own path, and must press forward with eyes turned steadfastly ahead, although at present I could see no further than the prairie station that I would reach some time before dawn the next day. A wheat-grower's dwelling thirty miles back from the railroad was registered as wanting assistance, the immigration officer said. Slowly, with more snow and a freshening of the bitter wind, the afternoon wore itself away, and I was glad when that evening I boarded the west-bound train. It was thronged with emigrants of many nationalities, and among them were Scandinavian maidens, tow-haired and red-cheeked, each going out to the West to be married. Their courtship would be brief and unromantic, but, as I was afterward to learn, three-fourths of the marriages so made turned out an unqualified success. Still, I found a corner in the smoking end of a long Colonist car, and, with the big bell clanging and a storm of voices exchanging farewells in many tongues, the great locomotive hauled us out into the whirling snow.

Thick flakes beat on the windows, and icy draughts swept through the car, while the big stove in a boxed-in corner hummed with a drowsy roar. With half-closed eyes I leaned back against the hard maple while the preceding scenes of the long journey rolled like a panorama before me. Twelve days it took the ancient steamer, which swarmed like a hive, to thrash through mist and screaming gale across the Atlantic, while fifteen hundred emigrants below wished themselves dead. Then there followed an apparently endless transit in the lurching cars, where we slept as best we could on uncushioned seats and floor, through dark pine forests, with only an occasional tin-roofed hamlet to break the monotony. After that there were wooden cities in Ontario very much like the hamlets of a larger growth; and when at last sickened by the vibration, we sped out on to the long-

expected prairie, the prospect was by no means inviting. Spring, I was told, was very late that year, and the plains rolled before us to the horizon a dreary white wilderness streaked by willow-swale, with at first many lonely lakes rippling a bitter steely-blue under the blasts, while crackling ice fringed their shores. Then several of my companions, who were young and romantic Britons with big revolvers strapped about them under their jackets, grew suspiciously quiet, and said no more about the strange adventures they had looked for in the West. There was nothing romantic about this land, which lacked even the clear skies Grace Carrington spoke of. It looked a hard country, out of which only a man with the power of stubborn endurance could wrest a living.

So with a rhythmic beat of whirring wheels, and now and again a clash of couplings as we slid down some hollow of the track, we rolled on through the night, while the scream of wind grew louder outside the rattling cars. I was nearly asleep when there came a sudden shock, and the conductor's voice rang out warning us to leave the train. At slackened speed we had run into a snow block, and the wedge-headed plow was going, so he said, to plug the drifts under a full pressure, and butt her right straight through.

Shivering to the backbone, I dropped from the platform into two feet of snow, and after floundering through it I halted among a group of excited men behind the two huge locomotives. For a newcomer it was a striking scene. The snow had ceased, and watery moonlight lit up the great white plain, in the midst of which, with the black smoke of the engines drifting across under a double column of roaring steam, stood the illuminated train. There was nothing else to show that man had ever been there before, except the spectral row of telegraph posts that dwindled in long perspective to the horizon. Ahead a billowy drift which

filled a hollow rose level with the wedge-shape framing on the snow-plow front. They run both better plows and more luxurious Colonist cars now.

"Will they get through?" I asked a tall man in fur robes with whom I had chatted.

"Oh, yes, you just bet they will," he answered cheerfully. "Jim Grant and Number Sixty are a very bad pair to beat; he'll either jump the track or rush her through it. He's backing her out now for the first lead."

With a clang of the bell to warn us off the line, the coupled engines slowly shoved the long train back the way they had come. Then the roar of blown-off steam grew still, and with loud blasts from the funnels that rapidly quickened they swept again down the slight grade like snorting giants, the huge head-lamp casting a blaze of radiance before them. It went out suddenly; I heard the thud of a soft but heavy shock, and long waves of whiteness curled up, while above it there was a hurling aloft of red sparks from the twin funnels. Then the tail-light glimmered more brightly as it returned again, and we looked into the steep hollow with rammed-back slopes out of which the engines backed slowly.

"She'll do it sure next time," said the passenger. "Grant's going right back to Winnipeg to get on speed enough;" and under an eddying blast of steam the massive locomotives charged past us once more, while I felt a thrill as I watched them, and envied Grant, the engineer. It was something to hold that power in the hollow of one's hand. Thick white powder whirled aloft like smoke before them, a filmy wavy mass that seemed alive rolled aside, while presently the whistle boomed in triumph, and there was an exultant shout from the passengers, for steam had vanquished the snow, and the road lay open before us. Blundering down the gap they had made I climbed on board the train,

colder than ever. As my new friend seemed a native of the neighborhood, I asked him whether he knew the farmer to whom I was going to offer my services.

He laughed as he answered: "I ought to. Beat me badly over a deal in stock he did. Old Coombs is a Britisher, and a precious low-grade specimen. Dare say he'll take you, but stick him for half as much again as he offers you, and bargain *ex* harvest — you'll get double wages anywhere then — see? How does this great country strike you — don't think much of it? — well, go slow and steady and it will grow on you. It's good enough for me, and I was raised on the best land in Ontario."

This was not encouraging, but I knew that most beginnings are unpleasant, and I went shivering to sleep until in the gray twilight of what might have been a mid-winter dawn a blast of the whistle awakened me and the brakes began to scream. The train ran slowly past an edifice resembling a sod stable with one light in it, stopped, and the conductor strode into the car. Even now the Western railroad conductor is a personage, but he might have been an emperor then, and this particular specimen had lorded it over the Colonist passengers in a manner that for several days had made me long to rebuke him. It was foolish, of course, but I was as yet new to the ways of the country, and I fear we were always a somewhat combative family.

"Any one for Elktail? Jump off; we can't wait all night with the west-bound mail," he said. "Say you," looking at me, "you had an Elktail ticket. Why aren't you getting off?"

"It's Vermont I am bound for," I answered sleepily. "You will see it on my ticket if you look in your wallet;" but this, of course, the magnate refused to do, and when another hoot of the whistle announced the engineer's impatience he called a brakeman, saying:

"You are bound for Elktail, and we've no time for fooling. Won't get off? Well, we'll soon put you," and, grasping my shoulder, he hustled me toward the platform of the car.

Now, though Martin Lorimer sometimes gave way to outbreaks of indignation, he was fond of impressing the fact on me that if forced into a quarrel one should take the first steps deliberately. Also, even then I remembered that Coombs' homestead lay almost as near Elktail, and a happy thought struck me. So I offered but little resistance until, as we stood on the platform, the brakeman or some one waved a lantern; then, while with a shock of couplings the cars commenced to move, I gripped the guard-rail with one hand and held the other ready, for I had determined if I left that train before I reached Vermont the conductor should certainly leave it too.

"Off with you!" he shouted, and shook me by the shoulder; but I seized him by the waist — the cars were moving faster now — and then flung myself off backward into the snow. I fell softly for as it happened the conductor fell under me, and, profiting by experience hardly earned in several colliery disputes, I took the precaution of sitting on him before he could get up.

"It won't be my fault if you get hurt because you don't keep still," I said.

Then there was a roar of laughter close by, and staring breathless down the track I saw the tail-light of the train grow dimmer across the prairie until it stopped and came swinging toward us again.

"I'd rather have lost five dollars than missed that," said my new friend, rubbing his hands. "Not bad for a raw Britisher — put the boss conductor off his own train and held up the Vancouver mail! Say, what are you going to do with him, sonny?"

"He can get up, and learn to be civil," I answered grimly; and when the man did so, sullenly, the other said:

"Well, I don't want any mess-up with the brakeman, so we may as well walk out now that they're coming back for him. Only one man in this shanty, and he wouldn't turn out unless it were a director. Leave your baggage where they dumped it — can't move it until daylight — and come along with me!"

I did so somewhat regretfully, for I felt just then that if this was the way they welcomed the emigrant in that country it would be a relief to do battle with the whole of them. Afterward I learned that when one understands his ways, which is difficult to do at first, there are many good qualities in the Western railroad-man. Still, I always wondered why the friendless newcomer should be considered a fair mark for petty hostility, especially by those who formerly were poor themselves — all of which applies only to city-bred men who hold some small office, for those who live by hard labor in forest and prairie would share their last crust with the stranger.

We trudged away from the station, with a square block of wooden houses rising nakedly in front of us from the prairie, and two gaunt elevators flanking it to left and right beside the track, which is one's usual first impression of a Western town. The rambling wooden building which combined the callings of general store and hotel was all in darkness, for the owner expected no guests just then, and would not have got up for any one but my companion if he had. So, after pounding long on the door, a drowsy voice demanded, with many and vivid expletives, who was there, and then added:

"Oh, it's you, Jasper; what in the name of thunder are you making all that row about? And what are you doing waking up a man this time o' night! Hold on! You're an

obstinate man, and I guess you'll bust my door unless I let you in."

The speaker did so, and when he had ushered us into a long bare room with a stove still twinkling in the midst of it, he explained that his subordinates would not serve an ambassador before the regulation breakfast hour, and lighting a kerosene lamp immediately withdrew. Jasper, however, took it all as a matter of course, and when, rolled in his long coat, he stretched himself on a settee and went to sleep, I followed suit. Still they gave us a good breakfast — porridge, steak, potatoes, corn-cakes and molasses — at which I wondered, because I had not discovered as yet that there is no difference on the prairie between any of the three meals of the day.

When it was finished, my companion, who gave me directions as to how to find Coombs' homestead, added:

"Remember what I told you about harvest, and, if you strike nothing better, when the wheat is ripe come straight back to me. I'm Long Jasper of Willow Creek, and every one knows me. I like your looks, and I'll give you double whatever Coombs pays you. Guess he'll have taught you something, and I'm not speculating much when I stake on that. You'll fetch Jackson's crossing on the flat; go in and borrow a horse from him. Tell him Jasper sent you. Your baggage? When the station agent feels energetic he'll dump it into his shed, but I guess there's nothing that would hurry him until he does. Now strike out; it's only thirty miles, and if you go on as you've begun you'll soon feel at home in this great country!"

I thanked him sincerely and departed; and, as I passed the station, I saw that the agent evidently had not felt energetic yet, for my two boxes lay just where they had been flung out beside the track. As a preliminary experience it was all somewhat daunting, and the country forbidding,

raw, even more unfinished than smoke-blackened Lancashire, and very cold; but I had found that every one seemed contented, and many of them proud of that new land, and I could see no reason why I too should not grow fond of it. At least I had not seen a hungry or a ragged person since I landed in Canada. Besides, Carrington Manor was less than fifty miles away, though it was evident now that a great gulf lay between Ralph Lorimer, the emigrant seeking an opportunity to learn his business as farm-servant, and the heiress of Carrington.

CHAPTER IV

AN UNPLEASANT APPRENTICESHIP

BY this time the sun was high, and, fastening the skin coat round my shoulders with a piece of string, I trudged on, rejoicing in the first warmth and brightness I had so far found in Canada. But it had its disadvantages, for the snow became unpleasantly soft, and it was a relief to find that the breeze had stripped the much thinner covering from the first of the swelling rises that rolled back toward the north. Here I halted a few minutes and surveyed my adopted country.

Behind lay the roofs of Elktail, some of them tin-covered and flashing like a heliograph; in front a desolate wilderness where the gray-white of frost-bleached grasses was streaked by the incandescent brightness of sloppy snow. There was neither smoke nor sign of human presence in all its borders — only a few dusky patches of willows to break the vast monotony of white and blue. And somewhere out on those endless levels, thirty miles to the north, lay the homestead of the man who might not give me employment even if I could find the place, which, remembering Jasper's directions, seemed by no means certain. However, the first landmark at least was visible, a sinuous line of dwarfed trees low down on the horizon; and gathering my sinking courage I struck out for it. Slowly the miles were left behind — straggling copse, white plateau, and winding ravine — until it was a relief to find an erection of sod and birch-poles nestling in a hollow. The man who greeted me in the

doorway was bronzed to coffee color by the sun-blink on snow, and his first words were: "Walk right in, and make yourself at home!"

He was thin, hard, and wiry; the gray slouch hat and tattered deerskin jacket became him; while, if he had not the solidity of our field laborers, he evidently had nothing of their slowness, and with natural curiosity I surveyed him. There were many in Lancashire and Yorkshire who might beat him at a heavy lift, but few who could do so in a steady race against time from dawn to dusk, I thought. Then somewhat awkwardly I explained my business, and, mentioning Jasper, asked if he would lend me a horse, whereupon he called to the cheerful, neatly-dressed woman bustling about the stove:

"Hurry on that dinner, Jess!"

Next, turning to me, he added: "You're welcome to the horse, but it will be supper-time before you fetch Coombs' homestead, and you mayn't get much then. So lie right back where you are until dinner's ready, and tell us the best news of the Old Country. Jess was born there."

It was characteristic treatment, and though the meal was frugal — potatoes, pork, green tea, flapjacks and drips, which is probably glucose flavored with essences — they gave me of their best, as even the poorest settlers do. One might travel the wide world over to find their equal in kindly hospitality. Perhaps the woman noticed my bashfulness, for she laughed as she said:

"You're very welcome to anything we have. New out from England, I see, and maybe we're rough to look at. Still, you'll learn to like us presently."

In this, however, she was wrong. They were not rough to look at, for though it was plain to see that both toiled hard for a bare living there was a light-hearted contentment about them, and a curious something that seemed akin to

refinement. It was not educational polish, but rather a natural courtesy and self-respect, though the words do not adequately express it, which seems born of freedom, and an instinctive realization of the brotherhood of man expressed in kindly action. Hard-handed and weather-beaten, younger son of good English family or plowman born, as I was afterward to find, the breakers of the prairie are rarely barbaric in manners or speech, and, in the sense of its inner meaning, most of them are essentially gentlemen.

It was with a lighter heart and many good wishes that I rode out again, and eventually reached Coombs' homestead, where a welcome of a different kind awaited me. The house was well built of sawn lumber, and backed by a thin birch bluff, while there was no difficulty in setting down its owner as an Englishman of a kind that fortunately is not common. He was stout and flabby in face, with a smug, self-satisfied air I did not like. Leaning against a paddock rail, he looked me over while I told him what had brought me there. Then he said, with no trace of Western accent, which, it afterward appeared, he affected to despise:

"You should not have borrowed that horse, because if we come to terms I shall have to feed him a day or two. Of course you would be useless for several months at least, and with the last one I got a premium. However, as a favor I'll take you until after harvest for your board."

"What are the duties?" I asked cautiously. And he answered:

"Rise at dawn, feed the working cattle, and plow until the dinner-hour — when you learn how. Then you could water the stock while you're resting; plow, harrow, or chop wood until supper; after that, wash up supper dishes, and — it's standing order — attend family prayers. In summer you'll continue hay cutting until it's dark."

Now the inhabitants of eastern Lancashire and the West Riding are seldom born foolish, and Jasper had cautioned me. So it may have been native shrewdness that led to my leaving the draft for one hundred pounds intact at the Winnipeg office of the Bank of Montreal and determining to earn experience and a living at the same time as promptly as possible. Also, though I did not discover it until later, this is the one safe procedure for the would-be colonist. There is not the slightest reason why he should pay a premium, because the work is the same in either case; and as, there being no caste distinction, all men are equal, hired hand and farmer living and eating together, he will find no difference in the treatment. In any case, I had no intention of working for nothing, and answered shortly:

"I'll come for ten dollars a month until harvest. I shall no doubt find some one to give me twenty then."

Coombs stared, surveyed me ironically from head to heel again, and, after offering five dollars, said very reluctantly:

"Seven-fifty, and it's sinful extravagance. Put the horse in that stable and don't give him too much chop. Then carry in those stove billets, and see if Mrs. Coombs wants anything to get supper ready."

I was tired and sleepy; but Coombs evidently intended to get the value of his seven-fifty out of me — he had a way of exacting the utmost farthing — and after feeding the horse, liberally, I carried fourteen buckets of water to fill a tank from the well before at last supper was ready. We ate it together silently in a long match-boarded room — Coombs, his wife, Marvin the big Manitoban hired man, and a curly-haired brown-eyed stripling with a look of good breeding about him. Mrs. Coombs was thin and angular, with a pink-tipped nose; and in their dwelling — the only place I ever saw it on the prairie — she and her

husband always sat with several feet of blank table between themselves and those who worked for them. They were also, I thought, representatives of an unpleasant type — the petty professional or suddenly promoted clerk, who, lacking equally the operative's sturdiness and the polish of those born in a higher station, apes the latter, and, sacrificing everything for appearance, becomes a poor burlesque on humanity. Even here, on the lone, wide prairie, they could not shake off the small pretense of superiority. When supper was finished — and Coombs' suppers were the worst I ever ate in Canada — the working contingent adjourned after washing dishes to the sod stable, where I asked questions about our employer.

"Meaner than pizon!" said Marvin. "Down East, on the 'lantic shore, is where he ought to be. Guess he wore them out in the old country, and so they sent him here."

Then the young lad stretched out his hand with frank good-nature. "I'm Harry Lorraine, premium pupil on this most delectable homestead. You're clearly fresh out from England, and I'm sure we'll be good friends," he said. "Coombs? Well, Jim Marvin is right. I've set him down in my own mind as a defaulting deacon, or something of the kind. Did my guardian out of a hundred and fifty as premium, with duck, brant-goose, and prairie-chicken shooting thrown in — and he sees I've never time to touch a gun. However, I'm learning the business; and in spite of his quite superfluous piety he can farm, in a get-all-you-can-for-nothing kind of way."

"He can't, just because of that same," broke in the prairie-born. "I'm sick of this talking religion, but you'll see it written plain on furrow and stock that when the Almighty gives the good soil freely He expects something back, and not a stinting of dumb beasts and land to roll up money in the bank. Take all and give nothing don't pan

out worth the washing, and that man will get let down of a sudden some cold day. Hallo! here's the blamed old reprobate coming."

Coombs slid through the stable with a cat-like gait and little eyes that noticed everything, while Harry leaned against a stall defiantly sucking at his pipe, and I wondered whether I was expected to be working at something.

"Idleness does not pay in this country, Lorimer," he said, with a beatific air. "Diligence is the one road to success. There is a truss of hay waiting to go through the cutter. Harry, I notice more oats than need be mixed with that chop."

He went out, and Harry laughed as he said, "Always the same! Weighs out the week's sugar to the teaspoonful. But you look tired. If you feed I'll work the infernal chopper."

So for a time I fed in the hay, while Harry swung up and down at the wheel, slender and debonair in spite of his coarse blue garments, with merry brown eyes. He was younger than I, and evidently inferior in muscle; but, as I know now, he had inherited a spirit which is greater than mere bodily strength. No man had a truer comrade than I in Harry Lorraine, and the friendship which commenced in the sod stable that night when I was travel-worn and he cut the hay for me will last while we two remain on this earth, and after, hallowed in the survivor's memory, until — but, remembering Coombs, I know that silence is often reverence, and so leave Grace's clean lips to voice the eternal hope.

We went back for family prayers, when Coombs read a chapter of Scripture; and he read passably well, though, for some reason, his tone jarred on me, while Harry fidgeted uneasily. Now I think it would jar even more forcibly. A hard life face to face with wild nature, among fearless,

honest men, either by land or sea, induces, among other things, a becoming humility. There are times, out on the vast prairie, when, through glories of pearl and crimson, night melts into day, or up in the northern muskegs, where the great Aurora blazes down through the bitter frost, when one stands, as it were, abashed and awe-stricken under a dim perception of the majesty upholding this universe. Then, and because of this, the man with understanding eyes will never be deceived by complacent harangues on sacred things from such as Coombs who never lend a luckless neighbor seed-wheat, and oppress the hireling. Much better seemed Jasper's answer when Harry once asked him for twenty acres' seed: "Take half that's in the granary, if you want it. Damnation! why didn't you come before?"

We retired early, Harry and I, to sleep in the same room, with the rusty stove-pipe running through it; and we rose, I think, at four o'clock; while an hour later the feet of the big plow-oxen were trampling the rich loam where the frost had mellowed the fall back-setting. We worked until nine that night, and I had words with Coombs when he gave me directions about plowing. We do not get our land for nothing in Lancashire, and so learn to work the utmost out of every foot of it. However, I do not purpose to dilate upon either disc-harrows or breaking prairie, nor even the cutting of wild hay — which harsh and wiry product is excellent feeding — for all these matters will be mentioned again. Still, as spring and summer rolled away, I gathered experience that saved me a good deal of money, and I felt at least an inch less round the waist and another broader round the shoulders.

Then one Saturday evening, when the northwest blazed with orange and saffron flame, I lay among the tussocks of whispering grass reading for the third or fourth time a few well-worn letters from Cousin Alice. Acre by acre

the tall wheat, changing from green to ochre, rippled before me; and, had its owner's hand been more open, it would have been a splendid crop. Marvin, Harry, and I had plowed for and sown it, because Coombs despised manual labor, and confined himself chiefly to fault-finding. It struck me that if we could do this for another we could do even more for ourselves. My agreement expired at harvest, and already the first oats were yellowing. Coombs' voice roused me from a pleasant reverie, wherein I sat once more with Alice beside the hearth in England.

"It's not dark yet, and there's the wire waiting for the paddock fence," he said. "I regret to see you addicted to loafing. And Mrs. Coombs has no water left for the kitchen."

Saying nothing, I smiled a little bitterly as I marched away to carry in water, and then the lady, whose thin face seemed sourer than usual that evening, set me to wash the supper dishes. All went well until I had the misfortune to break a stove-cracked plate, when looking at me contemptuously she said:

"How very clumsy! Do you know you have cost me two dollars already by your breakages? No — the handle always toward a lady! But what could be expected? You were never brought up."

Now the frying-pan or spider I held out had stood with its handle over an open lid of the range, so, though nettled, I still held it turned from her, and answered shortly:

"Not to wash dishes, madam, though my up-bringing has nothing to do with the case."

With an impatient gesture she reached over and grasped the hot handle, then dropped it with a cry just as the door opened and Coombs came in. This did not displease me, for if a quarrel must come it comes best quickly, and I listened unmoved while the mistress of the homestead said:

"Walter, I think you had better get rid of this man. He not only breaks my crockery, but set a cruel trap to burn my fingers, and I do not choose to be insulted by a hired hand."

"Have you anything to say before I turn you out on the prairie?" asked Coombs pompously; and remembering many an old grievance I answered with cheerful readiness:

"Nothing of much moment, beyond that I warned Mrs. Coombs, and it was an accident. But it is cooler without, and we can discuss it better there."

He followed in evident surprise, and I chuckled when he even walked after me into the stable, for already I guessed that if I left before the harvest I might have trouble about my wages. So far, in spite of several requests, Coombs had paid me nothing. It is also possible that a penniless newcomer of peaceful disposition might have been victimized, but I had learned in several industrial disputes, argued out with clog and brickbat as well as upon barrel-head platforms, that there are occasions when ethical justice may well be assisted by physical force. Besides, I was a Lingdale Lorimer, and would have faced annihilation rather than let any man rob me of my right.

"I am afraid Mrs. Coombs is prejudiced against me, and it might save unpleasantness if you paid me my wages and I left this place to-night," I said; and read in Coombs' face that this was by no means what he desired. Wages are high at harvest and labor scarce, while any one with a knowledge of working land was a god-send at seven dollars a month. But Coombs was equal to the emergency.

"I regret to see so much dishonesty in one so young," he said. "Our bargain was until after harvest, and I'll neither pay you a dollar nor give up your boxes if you go before. Let this be a lesson, if I overlook it, to confine yourself to the truth."

I forget what I answered — we were always a hot-blooded race — but I fancy that several adjectives and the word hypocrite figured therein; while Coombs, shaken out of his usual assumption of ironical courtesy, made a serious mistake when he tried bullying. As he strode toward me, fuming like an irate turkey cock, in an absurdly helpless attitude, I grasped his shoulder and backed him violently against a stall. Then, and whether this was justifiable I do not know, though I know that otherwise not a cent would I ever have got, I took out his wallet, which, as he had been selling stock in Brandon, contained a roll of dollar bills, and counted out the covenanted hire.

"Now I'm going to borrow your spare horse to carry my box," I said. "It will be sent back from Jasper's to-morrow, and if you venture to interfere I shall be compelled to hurt you. Let this also be a lesson to you — never try to bluff an angry man and put your hands up like that."

I think he swore, I am sure he groaned distressfully when I went out with what was due to me. Meeting Harry I told him the story.

"I don't think my guardians care much about me, and I'm coming with you," he said. "Good evening, Mrs. Coombs, you may make dusters of any old clothes I leave. I am going away with Mr. Lorimer, and henceforward I am afraid you will have to trust Marvin, who'll certainly eat the sugar, or do your own plate washing."

So twenty minutes later, while Marvin stood chuckling on the threshold and waved his hat to us, we marched out in triumph, leading Coombs' steed which made an efficient pack-horse. It was dawn the next day when aching and foot-sore we limped into Jasper's. He lay back in his hide chair laughing until there were tears in his eyes when we told him the tale at breakfast, then smote me on the back as he said:

"I'd have given a good deal to see it — the cunning old rascal! Got your full wages out of him? — well, I guess you broke the record. What shall you do now? — stay right where you are. It's a bonanza harvest, and I'll keep my promise; fifteen dollars a month, isn't it? Mr. Lorraine! oh yes, I know him — offer you the same. Then when harvest's over we'll talk again."

Needless to say, we gladly accepted the offer.

CHAPTER V

A BID FOR FORTUNE

WE returned the horse with a note of sarcastic thanks, and flattered ourselves that we had heard the last of the matter. Several days later, however, when, grimed with oil and rust, I was overhauling a binder, a weather-beaten man wearing a serviceable cavalry uniform rode in, and explaining that he was a sergeant of the Northwest Police added that he had come in the first case to investigate a charge of assault and robbery brought against one Ralph Lorimer by Coombs. I told him as clearly as I could just what had happened, and I fancied that his face relaxed, while his eyes twinkled suspiciously as he patted the fidgeting horse, which did not like the binder.

Then sitting rigidly erect, the same man who afterward rode through an ambush of cattle-stealing rustlers who were determined to kill him, he said, "I'm thinking ye acted imprudently — maist imprudently, but I'm not saying ye could have got your wages otherwise oot o' Coombs. Weel, I'll take Jasper's security for it that ye'll be here, and away back to report to my superior. Don't think ye'll be wanted at Regina, Mr. Lorimer. Good-morning til ye, Jasper."

"Get down, Sergeant Angus," said Jasper, grasping his rein. "If you have run all decent whiskey off the face of the prairie, I've still got some hard cider to offer you. Say, don't you think you had better ride round and lock up that blamed old Coombs?"

There was less hard cider in the homestead when Sergeant Angus Macfarlane rode out again, and our presence was

never requested by the Northwest Police. Nevertheless, it became evident that either Coombs or his wife was of inquiring as well as revengeful disposition, and had read some of the letters I left about, for some time later, when the snowdrifts raced across the prairie I received the following epistle from Martin Lorimer:

"I return the last letter sent your cousin, and until the present cloud is lifted from your name I must forbid your writing her. Neither do I desire any more communications from you. We all have our failings, and there is much I could have forgiven you, but that you should have used your position in the mill to ruin that foolish girl Minnie Lee is more than I can overlook. The story has roused a very bitter feeling, even among my own hands, who are not particularly virtuous, and now that we are on the eve of the elections some of the other side's pettifoggers are using it freely. Still, I should gladly have faced all that, but for my own shame, knowing it is true. Her father is a half-mad religious fanatic of some sort; he came in to call down vengeance upon me, and I laughed at him, as I insulted the first man who told me, for his trouble. Then I remembered how by chance I once heard her arrange to meet you in Winnipeg. I understand the father is going out especially to look for you, and you had better beware of him. Further, I have a letter from a man called Coombs who brings a charge of robbery against you, saying it appeared his duty to advise me. This I returned endorsed, 'A lie,' because none of the Lingdale Lorimers ever stole anything back to the time of Hilary, who was hanged like a Jacobite gentleman for taking despatches sword in hand from two of Cumberland's dragoons. If you are ever actually in want you can let me know. If not, I am sorry to say it, I do not wish to hear from you."

Hot with rage I flung down the letter, and, though how it got there never transpired, a tiny slip of paper fluttered out from it, on which I read the words, "There is a shameful story told about you, Ralph, but even in spite of my dislike at mentioning it I must tell you that I do not believe a word of it. Go on, trust in a clean conscience, and the truth will all come out some day."

"God bless her for her sweet charity," I said; then sat staring moodily across the frozen prairie until Harry touched me on the arm.

"I hope you have no bad news from home," he said.

I have suffered at times from speaking too frankly, but I had full trust in Harry, and told him all, adding as I held out the letter:

"He ought to know me better; it's cruel and unjust. I'll write by the next mail to Winnipeg and send back the confounded money he gave me when I came out. Read that!"

Harry did so leisurely, wrinkling his brows; then he said: "I think I sympathize with your uncle — no, wait a little. That letter was written by a man who would much more gladly have defended you — you can recognize regret running through every line of it — forced to believe against his wish by apparently conclusive evidence. Otherwise, he would have ended with the first sentences. I should like him from this letter, and should be pleased to meet your cousin. In any case, apart from the discourtesy, you can't send the money back; from what you told me you are not certain even that it was a present. Better write and explain the whole thing, then if he doesn't answer leave it to time."

I can still see Harry standing wrapped in his long fur coat looking down at me with kindly eyes. In due time I learned that he gave me very good counsel, though it was much against my wishes that I followed it.

We worked hard for Jasper that harvest from the clear cold dawning until long after the broad red moon swung up above the prairie. Day by day the tinkling knives of the binders rasped through the flinty stems, and the tossing wooden arms caught up the tall wheat that went down before them and piled it in golden sheaves upon the prairie. This one machine has done great things for the Western Dominion, for without it when wheat is cheap and labor dear many a crop that would not pay for the cutting would rot where it grew. Jasper, however, possessed one of the antiquated kind which bound the sheaves with wire, and occasionally led to wild language when a length of springy steel got mixed up with the thrasher. Every joint and sinew ached, there were times when we were almost too tired to sleep, but — and this was never the case with Coombs — wherever the work was hardest the master of the homestead did two men's share, and his cheery encouragement put heart into the rest.

Then, drawn by many sturdy oxen, the big thrasher rolled in, and the pace grew faster still. The engine, like others in use thereabout, shed steam and hot water round it from every leaky joint, and kept Harry busy feeding it with birch billets and liquid from the well. There were sheaves to pitch to the separator, grain bags to be filled and hauled to the straw-pile granary, while between times we drove wagon-loads of chaff and straw bouncing behind the bronco teams to complete that altogether western structure. Its erection is simple. You drive stout birch poles into the sod, wattle them with willow branches, and lash on whatever comes handiest for rafters; then pile the straw all over it several fathoms thick, and leave the wind and snow to do the rest. When it has settled into shape and solidity it is both frost and rain proof, and often requires a hay-knife to get into it.

So, under a blue cloud of wood smoke, and amid blinding fibrous dust, panting men, jolting wagons, and the musical whir of the separator, the work went on, until the thrashers departed, taking their pay with them. Then, in the light box-wagons which first rolled across the uneven prairie on groaning wheels, and then slid in swift silence on runners over the snow, we hauled the grain to the railroad forty miles away. It was done at last, and Harry and I sat by the stove one bitter night considering our next move, when Jasper came in shaking the white crystals from his furs. He saw we were plotting something, and laughed as he said:

"Making up your bill? We'll square it at the fifteen dollars to the day you hauled in the last load. Now I heard you talking of taking up land, and I've been thinking some. Nothing to earn a dollar at before the spring, and it will cost you considerable to board at Regina or Brandon. Is there anything the matter with stopping here? If you are particular we'll make it a deal and cut in three the grocery bill. Meantime you can chop building lumber ready to start your house in spring. No, it isn't any favor; I'll be mighty glad of your company."

It was a frank offer; we accepted it as frankly, and lived like three brothers while the prairie lay white and silent month after month under the Arctic frost. Also we found that a young Englishman who lived twenty miles to the west was anxious to dispose of his homestead and one hundred and sixty acres of partly broken land at a bargain. We rode over to make inquiries, and learned that he had lost several successive crops. Jasper, however, said this was because he spent most of his time in shooting, while the man who wished to succeed in that region must start his work in grim earnest and stay right with it. Now he was going out to a berth in India, and would take the equivalent

of four hundred pounds sterling for the buildings and land, with the implements and a team of oxen thrown in — at least one hundred and fifty pounds down, and the rest to run at eight per cent. on mortgage. It was dirt cheap at the money, but there was no one to buy it, he said, and Jasper, who acted as our adviser, agreed with this.

"Got to make a plunge some time, and risking nothin' you never win," he said. "Figuring all round, it will fit you better than breaking virgin prairie, and you'll pay a pile of that mortgage off if you get a good crop next fall. Then one of you can take up the next quarter-section free land. More working beasts? I'll trade you my kicking third team at a valuation, and you can pay me after harvest. If the crop fails? Well, I'll take my chances."

We spent one night in calculations beside the glowing stove while the shingles crackled above us under the bitter cold, and found that by staking everything we could just manage it.

"I dare say I could raise a last hundred from my admiring relatives by hinting that without it I had serious thoughts of returning home," said Harry. "I don't know why, but they're particularly anxious to keep me away."

There was a ring of bitterness in his tone, and when in due time Harry got money he did not seem by any means grateful for it. It was long afterward before he told me much about his affairs, and even then I did not understand them fully, though it seemed probable that somebody had robbed him of his patrimony. Nobody, however, troubles about his comrade's antecedents in the West, where many men have a somewhat vivid history. The new land accepts them for what they are in the present, leaving the past to the mother country. So a bargain was made, and the vendor received his first instalments; and as that winter sped I looked forward, half-fearful, half-exultant, to what

the coming year should bring. Our feet at least were set on the long road which leads to success, and it was well that we could not see the flints and thorns that should wound them cruelly.

It was a clear spring morning, one of those mornings which on the wide grass-lands fill one's heart with hope and stir the frost-chilled blood, when Harry and I stood beside our teams ready to drive the first furrow. A warm breeze from the Pacific, crossing the snow-barred Rockies, set the dry grasses rippling; and the prairie running northward league after league was dappled with moving shadow by the white cloudlets that scudded across the great vault of blue. Behind us straggling silver-stemmed birches sheltered the little log-house of Fairmead, which nestled snugly among them, with its low sod-built stable further among the slender branches behind. Trees are scarce in that region, and the settlers make the most of them. The white prairie was broken by a space of ashes and black loam, with a fire still crackling in crimson tongues among the stubble at the further end of it. Straw is worth nothing there, so a little is cut with the ear, and the rest burned off in spring, while the grasses growing and rotting for countless centuries have added to the rich alluvial left by some inland sea which covered all the prairie when the world was young. Nature, as those who love her know, is never in a hurry, and very slowly, little by little, working on through forgotten ages, she had stored her latent wealth under the matted sod against the time when the plowshare should convert it into food for man and beast. There is no wheat soil on the surface of the earth to beat that of Assiniboia and Manitoba.

Harry leaned on the plow-stilts with a smile on his handsome sun-bronzed face, and I smiled at him, for we were young and hope was strong within us.

"Ralph, I feel a hankering after some old heathen cere-

monial, a pouring of wine upon it, or a garlanded priest to bless the fruitful earth," he said, "but we put our trust in science and automatic binders now, and disregard the powers of infinity until they smite the crop down with devastating hail. Well, here's the first stroke for fortune. Get up! Aw there, Stonewall!"

He tapped the big red ox with a pointed stick, the two beasts settled their massive shoulders to the collar, and with a soft greasy swish and a crackle of half-burnt stubble the moldboard rolled aside the loam. I too felt that this was a great occasion. At last I was working my own land; with the plowshare I was opening the gate of an unknown future; and my fingers tingled as I jerked the lines. Then while the coulter sheared its guiding line, and the trampling of hoofs mingled with the soft curl of clods, they seemed by some trick of memory to hammer out words I had last heard far away in the little weathered church under Starcross Moor, "And preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth so as in due time we may enjoy them."

There was a two-hours' rest at noonday, when we fared frugally on fried potatoes and the usual reistit pork, while Harry's oxen waded deep into a sloo, which is a lake formed by melting snow. Neither would they come out for either threats or blandishments until he went in too, with a pike; while Jasper's broncos, which were considerably less than half-tamed, backed round and round in rings when I attempted to re-harness them. Still, with laughter and banter we started again, and worked on until daylight faded and the stars twinkled out one by one above the dewy prairie. The scent of wild peppermint hung heavy in the cool air, which came out of the north exhilarating like wine, while the birch twigs sang strange songs to us as we drove the teams to the stable through the litter of withered leaves. An hour's work followed before we had made all straight

there, and it was with a proud feeling of possession that at last I patted the neck of one of the horses, while the nervous creature looking up at me with understanding eyes rubbed its head against my shoulder.

When the stove was lighted we drank green tea and ate more flapjacks which Harry had badly burned. I remember that when he handed me the first cup he said, "We haven't got champagne, and we don't want whiskey, but this is a great day for both of us. Well, here's luck to the plowing and increase to the seed, and, whether it's success or failure, what we have started we'll see through together!"

Half ashamed of display of sentiment, I clinked the cracked cup against his own, and Harry leaned forward toward me with a smile that could not hide the light of youthful enthusiasm in his eyes, graceful, in spite of the mold of the plowing on his fretted garments. Then he choked and spluttered, for the hot fluid scalded him, and a roar of laughter saved the situation. Made as it was over a cup of very smoky tea, that compact was carried out faithfully under parching heat and bitter cold, in the biting dust of alkali and under the silence of the primeval bush. For an hour we lounged smoking and chatting in ox-hide chairs, watching the red glow from the range door flicker upon the guns and axes on the wall, or the moonlight broaden across the silent grass outside each time it faded, until the mournful coyotes began to wail along the rim of the prairie and we crawled up a ladder into the little upper room, where in ten minutes we were fast asleep on hard wooden couches covered with skins. I remember that just before I sank into oblivion a vision of a half-mile length of golden wheat floated before my heavy eyes, with Grace Carrington standing, sickle in hand, beside it. Her dress was of the color of the ear-bent stems, her eyes as the clear ether above, and the sickle was brighter than any crescent

moon. Then it all changed. Powdery snow eddied through the withered stubble, and, against a background of somber firs that loomed above it, there was only the tall forbidding figure of Colonel Carrington. Afterward I often remembered that dream.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST CROP

EACH day brought much the same tasks at Fairmead until the disc-harrows had rent up the clods, and with a seeder borrowed from a neighbor ten miles away we drilled in the grain. While we worked the air above us was filled with the beat of wings, as in skeins, wedges, and crescents the wild fowl, varying from the tiny butter-duck to the brant goose and stately crane, went by on their long journey from the bayous by the sunny gulf to the newly thawn tundra mosses beside the Polar Sea. Legion by legion they came up from the south and passed, though some folded their weary pinions to rest on the way, and for a few short weeks every sloo was dotted with their plumage. Then they went on, and we knew we should see no more of them until the first blasts of winter brought them south again. All this appealed to our sporting instincts, but time was precious then, and though I glanced longingly at Harry's double-barrel, I did not lift it from the wall. Every moment had its duties, and the thought of the mortgage held us to our task.

Then there followed an interlude of building and well-digging, when we sank down some thirty feet or so, and rammed the shaft sides with nigger-head stones, while occasionally some of our scattered neighbors rode twenty miles to lend us assistance. Meantime, a tender flush of emerald crept across the crackling sod, and the birches unfolded their tiny leaves until the bluff shimmered with tender verdure silver inlaid, while the jack-rabbits, which had not as yet

wholly put off their winter robes of ermine, scurried, piebald and mottled, through its shadows. Then, while the wheat grew taller, and the air warmer every day, the prairie assumed an evanescent beauty which it presently put off again, for the flush faded from the grasses, and only the birch bluff remained for a refuge filled with cool neutral shadow in a sun-parched land. It was now time for the hay cutting, and we drove the rusty mower here and there across the dazzling plain, upon which willow grove and bluff stood cut off from the levels beneath by glancing vapor, like islands rising out of a shimmering sea. On much of it the grasses grew only to a few inches in length, and we had therefore to seek winter food for our beasts in each dried-up sloo, where they stood sometimes waist-high and even higher. No making was needed; the sun already had done that better than we could, and we merely drove the mower through, after which I went back with the loaded wagon, while Harry rode further out on to the prairie in search of another sloo.

The mosquitoes came down in legions and bit us grievously, until it was necessary to anoint our hair with kerosene. Our dwelling was stifling, so that as a matter of necessity we always cooked outside; but the temperature changed at sundown, and, lying full length on the peppermint-scented hay, we rode home content across the darkening prairie, which faded under the starlight into the semblance of a limitless dusky sea, while the very stillness voiced its own message of infinity. Neither of us would speak at such times. Harry had a turn for emotional sentiment, I knew, but I too could feel that it was good to lie there motionless and silent, and try to grasp its meaning. Then the strained sense of expectancy would fade at the sight of the approaching homestead, or a bronco blundering into a badger-hole would call us back to a work-a-day world.

Harvest came, and that year there was neither drought nor untimely frost, and our hearts grew light when the binders piled up a splendid crop. Still, when we proposed to prepare a thanksgiving feast for all our neighbors, Jasper, who had ridden over, grinned as he said, "Better lie low and pay off that mortgage. You're only starting, and they wouldn't expect it of you. Besides, you'll have had your fill of cooking before you have finished with the thrashers."

This proved correct enough, for when the men came in with the thrasher and the homestead vibrated to its hum, others whose harvests were garnered came too, out of goodwill, and Harry was cooking and baking all day long. Sometimes for hours together they kept me busy beheading and plucking fowls — we turned a steam jet on them from the engine to make the feathers come off; and it amused me to wonder what Alice would think if she saw me sitting, flecked all over with down, among the feathers, or Harry standing grimed with dust and soot, peeling potatoes by the bucketful beside his field kitchen. When the thrashers departed our larder and our henhouse were empty, and the grocery bill long; but we were only sorry that we could not entertain them more royally, for the men who worked for money at so much the bushel and the men who worked for friendship vied with one another in their labor, and there was no one among them but rejoiced at our success.

Wheat was in good demand at remunerative prices that year, and I remember the day we hauled the last load to the elevators. Winter had set in early, and wrapped in long skin coats we tramped beside the wagons across the waste of crackling sod, while the steam from the horses rose like smoke into the nipping air. We started long before the wondrous green and crimson dawn, for it was nearly a twelve hours' journey to the railway town. We reached it finally, after a tiresome ride; and then for two

hours we waited shivering among kicking and biting teams under the gaunt elevators before we could haul in our wagons, and for perhaps fifteen minutes there was a great whirring of wheels. Then they were drawn forth empty, and presently we came out of the office with sundry signed papers readily convertible into coin at Winnipeg, and marched exultant to the hotel, scarcely feeling the frozen earth beneath us in spite of our weariness. No spirituous liquor might be sold there, but for once we meant to enjoy an ample meal which we had not cooked ourselves, served on clean plates and a real white tablecloth.

It was a simple banquet, but we felt like feasting kings, and though since then we have both sat at meat among railroad magnates, deputations from Ottawa, and others great in the land, we never enjoyed one like it. Harry, forgetting he was in Western Canada, tried to slip a silver half-dollar into the waitress' hand, who dropped it on the floor, perhaps because in that region wages are such that the hireling is neither dependent on nor looks for a stranger's generosity. I stooped to raise the coin and hand it her, and then started as for the first time our eyes met, while a wave of color suffused the face of the girl who stepped backward, for it was Minnie Lee.

"Harry," I said, stretching out my hand to her. "This is the lady I told you about. You remember the letter. Now go along, and settle matters with the proprietor. Sit down, Minnie, I want to talk to you. Tell me how you came here, and why you left England, won't you?"

The girl had lost her pink-and-white prettiness. Her face was pale, and she was thinner than before, while there was a hard, defiant look in her eyes. Besides, she seemed ill at ease and startled when I drew out a chair for her, and I too was singularly ill at ease. We had the long room to ourselves, however, for on the prairie meals are served at a

definite hour, and usually despatched in ten minutes or so. Few men there waste time lounging over the table.

"I hardly knew you, Ralph — you have changed so much," she said, and I only nodded, for I was impatient to hear her story; and she had surely changed far more than I. The Minnie I used to know was characterized by a love of mischief and childish vanity, but the present one wore rather the air of a woman with some knowledge of life's tragedy.

"It's almost an old story now," she said bitterly. "Father had a craze for religion, mother was always sighing, and there was no peace at home for me. Then I met Tom Fletcher again — you remember him — and when he took me to concerts and dances I felt at last that I had begun to live. The endless drudgery in the mill, the little house in the smoky street, and the weary chapel three times each Sunday, were crushing the life out of me. You understand — you once told me you felt it all, and you went out in search of fortune; but what can a woman do? Still, I dare not tell father. All gaiety was an invention of the devil, according to him. We were married before the registrar — Tom had reasons. I cannot tell you them; but we were married," and she held up a thin finger adorned by a wedding-ring.

I remembered Fletcher as a good-looking clerk with a taste for betting and fanciful dress, who had been discharged from the Orb mill for inattention to his duties, and I wondered that Minnie should have chosen him from among her many other admirers of more sterling character.

"I said nothing to any one," she continued. "Tom was disappointed about something on which he had counted. He'd got into trouble over his accounts, too. There had been a scene with father, who said I was a child of the devil, and when Tom told me there was false accusation against him, and nobody must know we were going, we slipped away

quietly. I was too angered to write to father, and it might have put the police on Tom. Tom was innocent, he said. We had very little money, work was hardly to be had — and our child died soon after we settled in Winnipeg."

"Go on," I said gently, and she clenched her hands with a gesture that expressed fierce resentment as well as sorrow as she added:

"The poor little innocent thing had no chance for its life — we were short of even bare necessities, for Tom could pick up only a few dollars now and then — and I think that all that was good in me died with it. So when he found work watching the heater of a store a few hours each night, and the wages would not keep two, I had to go out and earn my bread here — and I sometimes wish I had never been born."

I made no answer for a space. There was nothing I could say that might soften such trouble as was stamped on her face; although I remembered having heard Jasper say that a weight clerk was wanted at the new elevator further down the line. Then, blundering as usual, I said:

"Do you know, Minnie, they blame me at home for bringing you out here, and I heard that your father had sworn to be revenged upon me?"

There was sullen fury in the girl's eyes — she was very young after all — but she kept herself in hand, and answered bitterly:

"It was like their lying tongues. Envy and malice, and always some one's character to be taken away. No; it was Tom — and Tom, God help us both, has lost his head and drinks too much when he can. But I must not keep you, Ralph Lorimer, and henceforward you have nothing to do with me."

A voice called "Minnie," and I had only time to say, "Perhaps I can find some better work for him; and you

will write home and tell them the truth for your own and my sake, won't you?" before she hurried away.

Then Harry and I walked down to the freight-siding, where the big box cars hauled out ready from under the elevators were waiting. Two huge locomotives were presently coupled on, there followed a clanging of bells, and we watched the twinkling tail-lights grow dimmer across the prairie. Part of our harvest, we knew, was on board that train, starting on the first stage of its long journey to fill with finest flour the many hungry mouths that were waiting for it in the old land we had left behind. The lights died out in a hollow far away on the prairie's rim, and Harry slipped his arm through mine, perhaps because his heart was full. With much anxiety, ceaseless toil, and the denying ourselves of every petty luxury, we had called that good grain forth from the prairie, and the sale of it meant at least one year free from care.

Before we turned away, straight as the crow flies a cavalcade came clattering up out of the silent prairie, while, after a jingle of harness, merry clear-pitched voices filled the station, and something within me stirred at the sound. There was no trace of Western accent here, though the prairie accent is rarely unpleasant, for these were riders from Carrington who spoke pure English, and were proud of it. Two, with a certain courtliness which also was foreign to that district, helped an elderly lady down from a light carriage luxuriously hung on springs, which must have been built specially at the cost of many dollars, and the rest led their well-groomed horses toward the store stables, or strolled beside the track jesting with one another. None of them wore the skin coats of the settlers. Some were robed in furs, and others in soft-lined deerskin, gaily fringed by Blackfoot squaws, which became them; but except for this they were of the British type most often met with gripping

the hot double-barrel when the pheasants sweep clattering athwart the wood, or sitting intent and eager with tight hand on the rein outside the fox cover.

Still, no one could say they had suffered by their translation to a new country, which was chiefly due to Colonel Carrington. He had been successful hitherto at wheat-growing on an extensive scale, and though few of the settlers liked him they could not help admiring the bold far-seeing way in which he speculated on the chances of the weather, or hedged against a risky wheat crop by purchasing western horses. Still, not content with building up the finest property thereabout, he aspired to rule over a British settlement, and each time that he visited the old country at regular intervals several young Englishmen of good family and apparently ample means returning with him commenced breaking virgin prairie. They were not all a success as farmers, the settlers said, and there were occasional rumors of revolt; but if they had their differences with the grim autocrat they kept them loyally to themselves, and never spoke in public of their leader save with respect. Now it was evident that his daughter was expected: they had come to escort her home in state, and no princess could have desired a finer bodyguard. They were the pick of the old country's well-born youth when they came out, and now they had grown to a splendid manhood in the wide spaces of the prairie.

Though they answered our greetings with good fellowship, I am afraid we regarded them a little enviously, for the value of some of their horses would have sown us a crop, and even Harry seemed unkempt beside them. We lived and dressed very plainly at Fairmead that year. Then amid a grinding of brakes, with lights flashing, a long train rolled in, and the group stood, fur cap in hand, about the platform of a car from which a dainty figure looked down at them.

It was Grace Carrington, and as I stood a little apart from the rest my heart leaped at the sight of her. Yet, either from bashfulness or foolish pride, I would not move a step nearer.

"What a picture!" said Harry softly. "A princess of the prairie and her subjects doing homage to her! Ralph, I say, you must not stare at the girl like that. But, by Jove, she's smiling this way — yes, she is really beckoning you!"

It was true, for a stripling who wore his deerskin jacket as though it were the dolman of a cavalry officer strode forward, and inclining his head said:

"If you are Mr. Lorimer, Miss Carrington desires to speak with you."

For some reason I drew Harry with me. It may have been that I felt the company of a comrade of my own kind would be comforting in that assembly; and then I forgot everything as, fixing her bright eyes on me, Grace held out her hand.

"It was kind of you to meet me, and this is an unexpected pleasure," she said. "You must come over to Carrington and tell me where you have settled. Or stay, Raymond, this is Mr. Lorimer — he was kind to me in England, and I want you to invite him to your approaching festivities. You will come, won't you, and bring your friend — very pleased to see you Mr. Lorraine, too; then I shall have an opportunity for talking with you."

"Delighted, of course, to please you," said a tall bronzed man of maturer years, bowing. "Met Mr. Lorimer already; pulled my wagon up most kindly when the team was stalled in a ravine. If I'd known you were from the old country would have ridden over already to ask you."

Further introductions followed, all effected in a queenly way, and with a last pleasant glance toward us Grace moved toward the carriage, while I fancied that some of the

younger among her bodyguard regarded us jealously. Harry and I stood silent until the cavalcade vanished into the dimness, and then, while the last beat of hoofs died away, the blood surged through every artery as he said:

"Wasn't she splendid! When she held out her hand to me I felt that I ought to go down on one knee and kiss it, and all that kind of thing, you know. Ralph, you stalked up like a bear; must have been dazed by too much brightness, because you never even raised your hat. Well, one can understand it; but I think some of the others would have liked to cut your big solid throat for you."

Harry was both enthusiastic and impressionable, though I did not think so then, and the whole scene could scarcely have lasted five minutes, but it filled my mind for days afterward, and I can recall it clearly still.

CHAPTER VII

HARVEST HOME

IT was a bitter night when Harry and I rode into the red glow of light that beat out through the windows of Lone Hollow, the furthest outlying farm of the Carrington group, where, now that the last bushel of his wheat had been sold in Winnipeg, Raymond Lyle was celebrating a bounteous harvest. Round about it, drawn up in ranks, stood vehicles — or rigs, as we call them — of every kind, for it seemed as if the whole country-side had driven in. Most of them were of better make than those we and the majority of the poorer settlers used, and it was hard not to covet when we managed to find a stall for our beasts.

When one has wasted precious time that in the whole season can scarcely be made up again, by riding behind oxen at the exhilarating pace of some two miles an hour, or hauling in grain with half-tamed horses which jib at every hill, it is easy to realize the advantages of an efficient team, and any of those we saw in the Lone Hollow stables would have saved us many dollars each year. Even in the West the poor man is handicapped from the beginning, and must trust to ready invention and lengthened hours of labor to make up for the shortcomings of indifferent tools.

Lyle, who had heard the trampling of hoofs, met us at the door. "It was kind of you to come, and I hope you will enjoy yourselves," he said. "We have tried to make things homely, but, as you know, this isn't England."

We shook off our wrappings and entered the long lamp-

lit hall, partly dazed by the sudden glare and warmth after the intense cold. It certainly was different from anything I had seen at home, for here in place of paint and gilding the decoration was in harmony with the country, bizarre and bountiful, with a beauty that was distinctly its own. Few oat-heads grown from English furrows might compare with the pale golden tassels that drooped in graceful festoons from the wall, while among the ruddier wheat-ears and bearded barley, antelope heads peeped out beside the great horns of caribou which the owner of Lone Hollow had shot in the muskegs of the north. Rifles and bright double-bitted axes of much the same pattern as those with which our forbears hewed through Norman mail caught the light of the polished brass lamps and flashed upon the wainscot, while even an odd cross-cut saw had been skillfully impressed into the scheme of ornamentation. But there was nothing pinchbeck or tawdry about them. Whirled high by sinewy hands, or clenched in hard brown fingers while a steady eye stared down the barrel, that a bridge might span a ravine where no bridge had been, or venison help to cut down the grocery bill and leave the more for the breaking of virgin soil, that steel had played its part in the opening up of a wide country. Yet, the suggestion of strict utility even enhanced its effectiveness, and I remembered with a smile the trophies of weapons stamped out by the gross in Birmingham which I had seen adorning our suburban villas at home.

The majority of the guests were English — one could see that at a glance, and the mother country had small reason to be ashamed of her outland sons. The clear skin showed through the snow-blink's tan, and the eyes were bright with a steadfastness that comes from gazing into wide distance. Sun, wind, and snow, the dust of parched earth and the stinging smoke of the drifts, had played their part in harden-

ing them, but still, a little deeper in color, a little stronger in limb, they were the same men one finds dwelling in many an English home. Standing beside a great open hearth, on which to aid the stove a huge pile of birch logs crackled joyously, the representative of an alien race drew a cunning bow across the strings of a dingy violin. He sprang from Gallic stock, a descendant of the old *coureurs* who for two centuries wandered in search of furs across the wilderness, even as far as the northern barrens, before the Briton came to farm. It was a waltz he played — at least, that was the time; but the music seemed filled with the sighing of limitless pines, and the air was probably known in France three hundred years ago. Still, weather-beaten men, and fair women who were considerably less numerous, swept light-heartedly round to it, and when, declining refreshment then, we found a corner, Harry and I sat staring with all our eyes at the scene before us.

After the monotonous labor of the past two years the swish of light dresses and the rhythmic patter of feet, with the merry faces and joyous laughter, moved me strangely. All this seemed to belong to a different world from the one in which we had been living, and I wondered whether any of those dainty daughters of Carrington would deign to dance with me. They might have been transplanted like English roses from some walled garden at home, and their refined beauty had grown to a fuller blossom on the prairie. Still, I knew they would have faded in the dry heat of the dwellings in an Eastern town.

"How do those French-Canadians learn to play like that?" said Harry. "No one taught them; inherited it, I suppose. I know that air; it's very old, and he's taking liberties with it masterfully; now it's like the cypress singing in the big coulée. Of course, it wasn't learned in one generation, but why does a waltz of that kind unsettle one

so, with a suggestion of ancient sorrow sighing through its gladness? But I'm forgetting, and vaporing again. We are ox-drivers, you and I."

I nodded silently, for I had not the gift of ready speech, and it was Harry who most often put my thoughts into words for me. Then I grew intent as he said:

"There she is. Who! — Miss Carrington — is there any one else to look at when she is in the room?"

Grace floated past us dressed as I had somewhere seen her before and could not recall it, though the memory puzzled me. Neither do I know what she wore, beyond that the fabric's color was of the ruddy gold one sees among the stems of ripening grain, while wheat ears nestled between her neck and shoulder, and rustled like barley rippling to the breeze, as with the music embodied in each movement of her form she whirled by us on Ormond's arm. He looked as he did when I last saw him, placidly good-humored, with the eyeglass dangling this time loosely by its cord.

Then I drew in my breath as the music ceased, and Raymond Lyle approached us, saying: "As usual, men are at a discount, but you have not had a dance, and most of the others have. Come, and I'll find you partners. Ah, if you are not tired, Miss Carrington, will you take pity on an old friend of yours? I have many duties, and you will excuse me."

He withdrew quickly, and Grace smiled. "One must never be too tired to dance with an old friend at a prairie feast," she said, running her pencil through the initials on a program which had traveled several hundred miles from Winnipeg. Then I felt uncomfortable, for I guessed the letters R. L. represented my host, who had good-naturedly made way for me. It was a kindly thought, but Raymond Lyle, who was a confirmed bachelor living under his self-willed sister's wing, had evidently guessed my interest and

remembered the incident of the jibbing team. It was a square dance, and Harry with a laughing damsel formed my *vis-à-vis,* but having eyes only for my partner I saw little but a moving mixture of soft colors and embroidered deerskin, for some of the men were dressed in prairie fashion. I felt her warm breath on my neck, the shapely form yielding to my arm, and it was small wonder that I lost myself in the glamour of it, until with the crash of a final chord from the piano the music stopped.

"And you have not danced for four years!" she said as I led her through the press. "Well, it has all come back to you, and out here there is so much more than dancing for a man to do. Yes, you may put down another, there toward the end, and fill in the next one two. I have been looking forward to a quiet talk with you."

I was left alone with pulses throbbing. There was very little in what she said, but her face showed a kindly interest in our doings, and it was no small thing that the heiress of Carrington should place me on the level of an old friend. Harry was chatting merrily with his late partner, who seemed amused at him, and this was not surprising, for Harry's honest heart was somewhat strangely united with a silver tongue, and all women took kindly to him. I found other partners and he did the same, so it was some time before we met again, and I remember remarking that all this gaiety and brightness seemed unreal after our quarters at Fairmead, and ended somewhat lamely:

"I suppose it's out of mere pity she danced with me. As you said, we are of the soil, earthy, and a princess of the prairie is far beyond our sphere. Yet she seemed genuinely pleased to see me. If it were even you, Harry!"

He laughed as he pointed to a large mirror draped in cypress, saying, "Look into that. You are slow at understanding certain matters, Ralph. Not seen the whole of

your noble self in a glass for two years? Neither have I. And it hasn't dawned upon you that you came out in the transition stage — a grub, or shall we say a chrysalis? No, don't wrinkle your forehead; it's only an allegory. Now you have come out of the chrysalis — see?"

Part of this was certainly true, for at Coombs' we had the broken half of a hand-glass to make our simple toilet, and at Fairmead a whole one of some four inches diameter which cost two bits, tin-backed, at the store, and I remember saying that it was an extravagance. Now I stared into the long glass, standing erect in my one gala garment of fringed deerskin.

"A little too bull-necked," Harry remarked smiling, "but, except for Raymond Lyle, the stiffest-framed man in the room. Solid and slow from shoulders to ankles; head — shall we say that of a gladiator, or a prize-fighter? Good gracious, Ralph, remember you're in a ball room, not trying on your trousseau."

His remarks were not exactly flattering, but for the first time I felt glad to stand a strong man among those who had other advantages behind them, though I fumed inwardly when presently I heard Harry's partner say:

"What a curious man your friend is! I saw him standing before the big glass actually admiring himself."

And Harry had the mendacity to assure her that this was a favorite habit of mine.

Afterward I chatted for a time with the giver of the feast. We had much in common, for he was a stalwart plainly spoken man whose chief concern was the improvement of his holding, and from what he said it was clear that taking season by season his bank account increased but little, while he mentioned that several of his neighbors lost a certain sum yearly. There are two ways of farming in the West, and it seemed that after all Harry and I had chosen

the better, the creeping on from acre to acre, living frugally, and doing oneself whatever is needed, then investing each dollar hardly saved in better implements.

Nevertheless, I saw that the men of Carrington who followed the other plan, spending and hiring freely, were doing a good work for the country, because even if they lost a small sum each year most of them could afford it, and their expenses would have been much greater at home. They helped to maintain a demand for good horses and the product of clever workmen's skill; they supported the storekeepers of the wooden towns; and the poorer settlers could always earn a few dollars by working for them. So it dawned upon me that it is well for the nation that some are content to take their pleasure, as these men did, in an occupation that brought them small profit, sinking their surplus funds for the benefit of those who will follow them. Neither does the mother country lose, because she reaps the fruit of their labors in the shape of cheap and wholesome food.

At last the conversation drifted around to the founder of Carrington.

"An austere man," said Lyle, "and he's somewhat different from the rest of us — ready to gather in wherever he can, very hard to get ahead of at a deal; but if he is keen it's all for the sake of his daughter. There are two things Carrington is proud of, one is this settlement, and the other his heiress. He's not exactly an attractive personage, but there are whispers that some painful incident in her mother's life soured him, and one learns to respect him. His word is better than most other men's bond, and if his will is like cast iron his very determination often saves trouble in the end."

Silence succeeded, for bold chords of music held the assembly still, and I saw Harry seated at the piano, which apparently had escaped serious damage in its long transit

across the prairie. This was a surprise, for I had not suspected Harry of musical proficiency. There was power in his fingers, hardened as they were, and when the ringing prelude to an English ballad filled the room more than his partner felt that he could call up a response to his own spirit from the soul of the instrument. The lad beside him also sang well, perhaps because he was young and sentiment was strong within him, but sturdy labor under the open heaven seems inimical to the development of hypercritical cynicism, and the men who at home would probably have applauded that song with an indulgent smile listened with kindling eyes and then made the long room ring with their bravos. Here, far away from the land that bred them, they were Britons still, and proud of their birthright.

Then Grace Carrington sang, and I would have given years of my life for Harry's skill, which seemed a bond between them as she smiled gratefully upon him. The words were simple, as became the work of a master who loved the open, and the music flowed with them like the ripple of a glancing water; so a deeper silence settled upon all, and I was back in England where a sparkling beck leaped out from the furze of Lingdale and sped in flashing shallows under the yellow fern, while somewhere beyond the singer's voice I could almost hear the alders talking to the breeze. When it ceased the sound grew louder, but it was only a bitter blast that came from the icy Pole moaning about the homestead of Lone Hollow.

Raymond Lyle stepped forward to express the wish of the rest, and Grace bent her fair head to confer with Harry, who nodded gravely, after which she stood still, while a stately prelude that was curiously familiar awoke old memories. Then the words came, and from the lips of others they might have seemed presumptuous or out of place, but Grace Carrington delivered them as though they were a

message which must be hearkened to, and there was an expectant hush when the first line, "A sower went forth sowing," rang clearly forth. Later some of those about me breathed harder, and I saw that big Raymond's eyes were hazy, while one hard brown hand was clenched upon his knee, as in sinking cadence we heard again, "Within a hallowed acre He sows yet other grain."

Then after the last note died away and there was only the moaning of the wind, he said simply, "Thank you, Miss Carrington. I am glad you sang it at the Lone Hollow harvest home."

"I would never have played it here for any one else," said Harry presently. "These things are not to be undertaken casually, but she — well, I felt they had to listen, and I did the best that was in me. I think it was her clean-hearted simplicity."

It was some time afterward when I led Grace out and spent a blissful ten minutes swinging through the mazes of a prairie dance, before we found a nook under dark spruce branches from the big coulée, where Grace listened with interest while I told her of our experiences in the Dominion. The background of somber sprays enhanced her fair beauty, and her dress, which, though there was azure about it, was of much the same color, melted into the festoon of wheat stalks below. The French-Canadian was playing another of his weird waltzes, and it may have been this that reminded me, for now I remembered how I had seen her so before.

"You will not laugh, I hope, when I tell you that all this seems familiar," I said hesitatingly. "Sometimes in a strange country one comes upon a scene that one knows perfectly, and we feel that, perhaps in dreams, we have seen it all before. Why it is so, I cannot tell, but once in fancy I saw you with a dress exactly like the one you are wearing

now, and the tall wheat behind you. Of course, it sounds ridiculous, but, as Harry says, we do not know everything, and you believe me, don't you?"

Grace's face grew suddenly grave, and there was a heightened color in it as she answered: "Your friend is a philosopher, besides a fine musician, and I quite believe you. I have had such experiences — but I think these fancies, if fancies they are, are best forgotten. Still, tell me, did you dream or imagine anything more?"

"Yes," I said, still puzzled as a dim memory came back, "I saw your father too. He seemed in trouble, and I was concerned in it. This I think was on the prairie, but there were tall pines too; while across the whole dream picture drove an alternate haze of dust and snow."

Grace shivered as though the relation troubled her, and was silent until she said with a smile:

"It must be that ghostly music. Louis of Sapin Rouge has missed his vocation. We will talk no more of it. You once did me a kindness; I wonder whether you would repeat it."

"I would go to the world's end," I commenced hotly, but stopped abashed as she checked me with a gesture, though I fancied that she did not seem so displeased at my boldness as she might have been. Then she answered, smiling:

"I thought you were too staid and sensible for such speeches, and they hardly become you, because of course you do not mean it. It is nothing very serious. There are signs of bad weather, and my aunt is not strong, so, as Miss Lyle presses us, we shall stay here until to-morrow noon, and I want you to ride over and tell my father. He might grow uneasy about me — and for some reason I feel uneasy about him, while, as he has been ailing lately, I should not like for him to venture across the prairie. It seems

unfair to ask you, but you are young and strong; and I should like you to meet him. He has his peculiarities, so our neighbors say, but he has ever been a most indulgent parent to me, and he can be a very firm friend. You will do this, as a favor, won't you?"

She gave me her hand as she rose, and, mastering a senseless desire to do more than this, I bowed over it and hurried away, feeling that hers was the favor granted, for Ormond and many others would gladly have ridden fifty miles through a blizzard to do her bidding. It was for this reason that I made my excuses to our host quietly, and Harry laughed as he said: "I'll ride over with the others for you when the dance is finished, but that won't be until nearly dawn. The length of these prairie festivities is equaled only by their rarity. But beware, Ralph. You are a poor wheat-grower, and too much of those bright eyes is not good for you."

I was glad of the skin coat and fur cap before I even reached the stables, and Jasper's horse made trouble when I led him out. He knew the signs of the weather and desired to stay there, because they were not promising. Now, though winter is almost Arctic in that region, the snow-fall is capricious and generally much lighter than that further east, though it can come down in earnest now and then. Thus, swept by the wind, the grass was bare on the levels, or nearly so, and there was no passage for steel runners, while our poor wagon, which would have carried us much more snugly swathed in wrappings, had broken down, as when wanted it usually did. So, shivering to the backbone, I swung myself into the saddle and hardened my heart to face the bitter ride.

CHAPTER VIII

HELD UP

IT was very dark. The wind had the coldness of death in it, and when the lights of Lone Hollow had faded behind the obscurity closed round me like a thick curtain. Still, trusting to an instinctive sense of direction men acquire in that land, I pushed on for the big coulée — one of those deep ravines that fissure the prairie and much resemble a railway cutting. This one was larger than the rest, and Carrington Manor stood near one end of it. The horse evidently had little liking for the journey, and did his best to shorten it, while I had hard work to keep my mittened hands from freezing as we swept onward through the night.

In places a thin carpet of snow-dust muffled the beat of hoofs, and there was no sound but the mournful shrilling of the wind, which emphasized the great emptiness and sense of desolation until I almost felt that I had ridden out of our busy life into primeval chaos. We are inclined to be superstitious on the prairie, which is not greatly to be wondered at. Fifty yards from the lighted homestead in wintertime there is only an overpowering loneliness, where Death with his ally the Frost King reigns supreme; while, living closer to nature, we learn that there are even yet many mysteries, and man plays but a small part in the business of the universe. Still, for a time the warmth within me kept out the frost; for Grace Carrington's hand had rested in mine, and I understood how the thought of service sus-

tains the Northwest troopers in their lonely vigil. They served the nation, but I was serving Grace.

Presently even this consolation grew fainter, and the spell of the white wilderness oppressed my spirits; for the air was filled with warning, and I knew that heavy snow was not far off. Sometimes very silently a dim shadow flitted past, and the horse started, snorting as he quickened his pace with the white steam whirling behind him. It may have been a coyote, or perhaps a timber wolf; for though the antelope had departed south, the settlers said that both from the bush of the Saskatchewan and beyond the Cypress hills the lean and grizzled beasts had come down into the prairie. Nevertheless, their noiseless passage harmonized with the surroundings; and at last I grew thankful for a slight drowsiness which blunted the imagination. But there were other riders out on the waste that night, and, with one hand on the slung rifle, I reined in the horse as three white-sprinkled figures came up at a gallop. Generally, as far as anything human is concerned, the prairie is as safe at midnight, if not safer, than a street in London town; but because game is plentiful there is generally a gun in the wagon, and when the settlers ride out they often carry a rifle at their back.

"Halt!" cried a voice I recognized; and there was a jingle of steel as two skin-wrapped troopers of the Northwest Police wheeled their horses on either side of me, while another, who spoke with authority, grasped my bridle. Even in that darkness I could see the ready carbines, and, knowing what manner of men these riders were, I was glad I could meet them peaceably.

"Your name and business," said the voice of Sergeant Macfarlane; and a disappointed laugh followed my reply as that worthy added, "Then if ye have no' been raiding Coombs lately ye can pass, friend. Seen no one on the

prairie? I'm sorry. Four cattle-lifting rustlers held up Clearwater Creek, and we're going south for the next post to head them off from the boundary. Well, time is precious. A fair journey til ye. It's a very bitter night, and snowing beyond."

With a faint clatter they vanished again; and I did not envy them their long ride to the next post, with a blizzard brewing. When his work is over or the snow comes down the settler may sleep snugly and sound, or lounge in tranquil contentment beside the twinkling stove, while, as the price of his security, the Northwest Police, snatching sometimes a few hours' rest under the gray cloud in a trench of snow, and sometimes riding a grim race with death, keep watch and ward over the vast territories. We do not rear desperadoes on the prairie, though some few are sent to us. Neither do they take root and flourish among us, because ours is a hard country and there are not many men in it worth robbing. However, there had been trouble over the border when the rich Cattle Barons strove to crowd out the poor man, and the hardest hit among the latter, with murderous Winchesters, lay in wait for the oppressor. I do not know the wrongs and rights of the whole question; neither were details of every skirmish published by the American press; but cruel things were done by each side, and it took a strong force of United States cavalry to restore order. Then broken men who had lost their livelihood, and some with a price upon their heads, made their name a terror on both sides of the frontier and kept the troopers busy.

So I was glad that those particular outlaws had journeyed south, and was even more pleased when I reached the coulée, for the cold was increasing and the ride had grown inexpressibly dreary. It was warmer down in the hollow among the trees, but so black that it was the horse rather

than I that avoided them, while now and then a branch lashed my forehead like a whip. There were cypress among them resembling solid masses of gloom, and the wind howled weirdly; but at last I blundered up the winding trail into sight of Carrington Manor. The big log-and-frame-built house was dark and silent, and though I knew that at least the majority of its inhabitants were at Lone Hollow the sight depressed me. Then, just as we drew clear of the trees, I checked the horse, for, silhouetted blackly against the sky, a single mounted figure kept watch over it. Perhaps it was instinctive caution, or it may have been that Grace's uneasiness had infected me, but I led Jasper's horse back into the coulée and hitched him to a tree, then, unslinging the rifle, stood still shivering as I watched the figure.

There was something sinister about it, and it might have been frozen stiff but for a faint rattle as the horse moved its head, while once I caught a rigid line across the saddle which suspiciously resembled a rifle. Then, recalling what Sergeant Macfarlane had said, I knew that while the police rode hot-foot toward the boundary the rustlers had doubled on their tracks to hold up Carrington Manor. It also struck me that as the main trail ran straight across the prairie the watcher knew nothing about the bridle-path through the coulée. In any case, it was plainly my duty to reach the homestead and render assistance if I could.

I made sure that the Winchester cylinder was filled with cartridges by pressing back the slide, and then I crept cautiously, with the dark trees for a background, toward the building, observing as I did so that the latter rendered the scout invisible to any one approaching by the direct trail. Then, stooping low, I crossed the bare space which divided me from the house, trusting that a humming bullet might not overtake me, and reached it safely with a heart that beat at twice its usual speed. It is one thing to face danger

in hot blood, but it is quite another and much more unpleasant matter to slink through the darkness wondering whether a foe one cannot see is following each movement with a rifle. Neither is there any chance of hitting back in such cases; for it is my opinion, from watching a stricken deer, that at short ranges the blow comes almost simultaneously as the optic nerve records the flash and before the ear has caught the explosion. All this I considered as I flattened myself against the wall — for I was by no means braver than my fellows — and presently, yard by yard, wormed myself along it until I passed a corner.

There a light shone out across the snow from a window, and I am perfectly willing to admit that I crawled toward it on hands and knees, for angry voices now reached me, and I knew that if I raised myself and the watcher had changed his position he could see me. I reached the sill at last with the rifle clenched in one mittened hand; and while I debated on my next procedure I heard Colonel Carrington say slowly and fiercely:

"I will neither sign nor tell you!"

Then, reflecting that while one can always see into a lighted room those inside it cannot see out, I determined to risk the scout's vigilance, and raised my head cautiously, for it was plain that something quite unusual went on inside. I looked into a kind of ante-room on one side of the entrance, which the ruler of Carrington used as an office or study. He sat in a basket chair with a frown on his face and disdain in his eyes, while a burly man muffled in wrappings leaned on the table opposite him, holding a rifle, the muzzle of which was turned toward the Colonel's breast. But there was no sign of fear about him, and I had heard the settlers say that nothing living could make Colonel Carrington flinch. An open check-book and some note-paper lay beside an inkstand on the table, and another armed

ruffian stood near the stove. The door of the hall close by stood partly open, and their voices were audible through it.

"I guess it's quite simple, but you make us tired," the latter said. "You'll tell us where the chest is, and just fill in that check, with a letter vouching for the bearer and explaining why you want so much in a hurry. Then, as I said before, you'll ride south with us a day or two while we arrange for cashing it, after which we'll let you go safely, on our honor."

Colonel Carrington laughed sardonically, and I could fancy his thin lips curling under the gray mustache before he answered:

"I hardly consider that a sufficient guarantee. Again, I will neither sign nor tell you where the chest is. Confusion to you!"

"You're a hard man," said the other almost admiringly. "If we'd had you to head us we'd have bluffed off Uncle Sam's troopers at the Cypress range. Still, we've no time for fooling, and if Jim finds the chest without you we'll risk putting up the price a thousand dollars or so. Jim is tolerably handy at finding things. See here, you have got to sign it, and sign it now, before this Winchester makes a mess of you!"

The Colonel glanced at the rifle coolly, as he answered: "I fail to see what good that would do. My handwriting is peculiar; you couldn't imitate it, while you would certainly be hanged when the troopers laid hands on you."

This was incontrovertible logic, and the two outlaws drawing apart conferred with each other softly, while I debated what I should do. The casement was a double one, but I felt sure I could drive a bullet through one of them. Still, even in the circumstances it looked too much like murder, and to this day I have never taken the

life of a man, though occasionally forced into handling one roughly. Before any decision could be arrived at a tramp of feet in the hall showed that somebody approached under a burden.

"Keep the muzzle on him," said one. "I guess Jim has found the coffer, and we'll make sure of that. I'll help him to cinch it on the horse if we can't open it. Colonel, we'll have to fine you the further thousand dollars."

I realized it was high time for me to vacate that position unless I wished the couple to discover me, and so I slipped back into the shadow, just in time, as they strode out carrying something. I watched them vanish into the blackness, heard the scout answer their hail, and then I crawled back swiftly — toward the door this time. A glance through the window in passing showed me that the remaining outlaw stood with his back toward the entrance, and his eyes fixed on the Colonel. The door was half closed when I reached it, and for a moment I stood there shortening my grip on the rifle and gathering my breath; then with a bound I drove it inward, and whirled aloft the butt of the Winchester.

The outlaw twisted round on his heels; but he moved an instant too late, for even as his fingers tightened on the trigger the steel heel-plate descended in the center of his face, and I felt something crunch in under it. He staggered sideways, there was a crash as the rifle exploded harmlessly, and before he could recover I had him by the neck and hurled him half-choked through the door. I had the sense to slam it and slip the bolt home; then, while I stood panting, the Colonel prepared to improve our position.

"Close those shutters and screw down the wing-nut hard," he said, hanging the lamp close beside the door. "Now, stand here in the shadow. I am much obliged to you, but you should have made certain of that fellow."

It was only natural that he should feel resentment; but there was a cold vindictiveness in his tone which made me realize that it was as well for the outlaw that I had not left him in the room. Then he spoke again:

"We have two good weapons; that rascal's cylinder is charged — I saw him fill it out of my own bandolier, and there is an armory in the other room. They took me by surprise — in Western parlance, got the drop on me. Of course they'll come back, but all the doors and windows are fast, and we could hear them breaking in, while in this kind of work the risk is with the aggressor."

A pounding on the door cut him short, and a hoarse, partly muffled voice reached us:

"We're about sick of fooling, and mean solid business now," it said. "Open, and be quick about it, before we smash that door down and try moral suasion by roasting both of you."

"You should have stayed when you were in," was the ironical answer. "No doubt you have observed the light under the door. Well, the first man across the threshold will get a bullet through him before he even sees us. Haven't you realized yet that this undertaking is too big for you?"

"Curse him; he's busted my best teeth in. Hunt round and find something for a battering ram," cried another voice, but though the assailants had possibly not caught all the answer, they evidently understood the strength of our position, for we heard them moving away.

"Gone to open the chest in the stables; they won't find much in it," said Colonel Carrington. "They will try a fresh move next time. Mr. Lorimer, of Fairmead, are you not? I wish to express my obligations again."

He took it very coolly, as it appeared he took everything, and smiled curiously as, glancing at his watch, he said half-

aloud: "Well, there are worse things than a clean swift ending, and there was a time when I should not have stepped aside to let death pass. But I apologize, Mr. Lorimer, for inflicting such talk on you. Hope we shall be friends if we come out of this safely. The check? — yes, we'll put it away. It might have saved trouble to sign it, but you see it was her mother's money, and I only hold it in trust for my daughter. Neither are we as rich as some suppose us to be."

His grim face relaxed, and his voice sounded different when he spoke of Grace, while a few moments passed before he added:

"It cannot be far from dawn, and there's not a soul in Carrington except you and myself. Grace took all my people with her to help at Lone Hollow. So, unless you are inclined to stalk them, which I should hardly suggest, as they might be too clever for you, we must await our friends' arrival and make the best of it."

I had no inclination whatever to try the stalking. To take a kneeling shot at an unsuspecting man seemed in any circumstances almost a crime; so we sat each with a rifle laid across his knees, and for the first time in two years I tasted excellent tobacco. But the vigil grew trying. The house seemed filled with whispers and mysterious noises. My throat grew dry, and the Colonel laughed when once I moved sharply as a rat scurried behind the wainscot. Neither of us felt inclined to talk, and our eyes were fixed steadfastly upon the door, until at last the lamp seemed to rise and fall with each respiration. Then the Colonel approached the window as though listening, after glancing once more at his watch.

"It must be daybreak, and I hear something," he said. "There is probably one of them watching, but we must chance it," and he moved softly toward the door. When

we stood outside the cold of the morning went through me like a knife. Still a rapid beat of horse hoofs rose out of the big coulée, and it was evident that the outlaws had heard them, for we saw two men busy with the horses at the stable door, while two more disappeared behind the bank of sods that walled off the vegetable garden. What their purpose was, unless they meant to check any accession to our strength while their comrades escaped with the coffer, was not apparent. It was blowing strongly now, and the air was thick with falling snow, but I made out two riders who resembled Harry and Ormond coming toward us at a gallop, with another horseman some distance behind. Then a hoarse shout reached us — "Stop right there, and wheel your horses before we plug you!"

I could not see into the hollow beneath the wall because it was some distance off and the snow whirled about it, but I could imagine the Winchester barrel resting on the sods while a steady eye stared through the sights, and knew that neither Ormond nor Harry carried weapons. So I started at a flounder toward them, roaring as I went:

"Go back — for your life, go back!"

They evidently did not hear me, though we were afterwards to hear the reason for an apparent act of madness. Harry was always reckless, and Ormond coolly brave, while as I ran I saw the two horses flying at the wall. A streak of red flame blazed out low down in the snow, a mounted man passed me leading two horses, and I neither knew nor cared whether he noticed me, for I felt suddenly dizzy, wondering whether the bullet had gone home. Neither did I hear any report at all, for my whole attention was concentrated on the black shapes of the riders breast high beyond the wall. Then one beast rose into the air, and I saw Ormond swing a riding crop round backward as though for the sword cut from behind the shoulder. A soft thud

followed, Harry's horse cleared the sods like a bird, and I blazed off my rifle at a venture toward the hollow as they thundered neck and neck past me. It was clear that empty-handed they had ridden either over or through the foe.

After that events followed too rapidly to leave a clear impression. A pair of half-seen figures which appeared at the other end of the hollow scrambled for the empty saddles, and one seemed to help his companion. Then they vanished into the whirling haze, and Colonel Carrington's Winchester rapped as he emptied the magazine at the flying foe, while by the time the new arrivals had mastered their excited beasts there was only a narrow circle of prairie shut in by blinding snow.

"Very glad to find you safe, sir," said Ormond. "We met the Blackfoot who peddles moccasins, and he told us he had seen four men he thought were Stevens' gang heading for Carrington, so we pushed on as fast as we could. Perhaps if we three went on with rifles we might overtake them."

Harry looked eager, and I was willing, but Colonel Carrington was wisest:

"You have done gallantly," he said, "but it would only be throwing lives away. The snow is coming in earnest, and it strikes me they have gone to their account unless they find shelter in a coulée."

Then they dismounted, and a hired man, who had lagged behind through indifferent horseflesh and no fault of his own, was despatched to prepare breakfast, and it was a merry party that assembled round the table. Even the ruler of Carrington's grim face relaxed.

"I am glad to make the acquaintance of both of you," he said. "You will make the best of Carrington I hope for a day or two."

We were nothing loth, for twenty miles of deepening

snow lay between us and our homestead, where we had little to do, while to complete my satisfaction Grace and her train arrived in the Lone Hollow sleigh early the next morning, and on hearing the story her eyes glistened as she thanked me. "I am so glad I sent you," she said, "and I feel I owe my father's safety, perhaps his life, to you. It is a debt I can never repay."

It was late that afternoon when another sleigh drew up before the Carrington gate, and three white-sheeted troopers lifted a heavy burden out of it. The thing, which seemed a shapeless heap of snow and wrappings, hung limply between them as they carried it into the hall, while it was Sergeant Angus Macfarlane who explained their errand.

"Lay him down there gently, boys," he said. "No, stand back, Miss Carrington, these kind o' sights are no for you. We found him in a coulée after yon Blackfoot peddler had told us Stevens had fooled us, and ye'll mind it's no that easy to fool the Northwest Police. He's one o' the gang, but the poor soul's got several ribs broken, an' after lying out through the blizzard I'm thinking he's near his end. It's a long ride to the outpost, forbye we have no comforts. Maybe ye'll take him — ay, I ken he's a robber, but ye cannot leave him to perish in the snow."

He flung back the wrappings, and before I could stop her Grace bent down over the drawn white face with the red froth on the lips, while Ormond said quietly:

"Very bad, poor devil! I fancied Robin's hoofs struck something that yielded when he made a landing. You will take him in if it's only to oblige me, sir."

Grace stood upright with tender compassion shining in her wet eyes as she fixed them on the old man.

"I am a woman now, father," she said, "and I should like to help to cure him if it can be done. We shall do everything possible for him, anyway. Bring him

forward, Sergeant Angus. Geoffrey, you know something of surgery."

"I don't make war on dying men. You will do whatever pleases you, Grace," the ruler of Carrington answered, indifferently.

They carried their burden into another room, and I waited beside the stove, with two faces stamped on my memory. The one was that of the wounded man with its contraction of pain and glassy stare, and the other the countenance of Grace Carrington transfigured for a moment by a great pity that added to its loveliness. Still, the coming of this unexpected guest cast a gloom upon us, and we seldom saw Grace, while Ormond, who seemed to know a little of everything, once said on passing: "I have fixed him up as well as I could, but I think a broken rib has pierced his lung, and he's sinking rapidly. However, Miss Carrington is doing her best, and he could not have a more efficient nurse."

It was late in the afternoon when, on tapping at the door in search of tidings, Ormond called me in. The daylight was fading, but I could see the limp, suffering shape on the bed, and Grace sitting near the window, leaning forward as though listening.

"Light-headed at times!" said Ormond; "but he was asking for you. Do you feel any easier now? Here's another inquirer anxious to hear good news of you."

The man turned his drawn face toward me, and tried to smile as he said: "I guess you're very good. Hope you don't bear malice. You oughtn't to anyhow — nearly broke my neck when you fired me through the doorway. All in the way of business, and I'm corralled now."

I bent my head with a friendly gesture, for even I could read death in his face, and the outlaw, glancing toward Grace, added:

"If I'd known you, Missy, we'd never have held up this homestead. White people all through, and you're a prairie daisy. What made me do it? Well, I guess that's a long story, and some of it might scare you. A big man froze me off my land, and some one rebranded my few head of stock. Law! we don't count much on that; it's often the biggest rascals corral the offices, and we just laid for them with the rifle. They were too many for us — and this is the end of it."

Grace moved toward him whispering something I could not catch, but the man smiled feebly, and I heard the grim answer:

"No; I guess it's rather too late for that. I lived my own way, and I can die that way too. Don't back down on one's partners; kind of mean, isn't it? And if it's true what you're saying I'll just accept my sentence. Going out before the morning; but I sent two of the men who robbed me to perdition first."

Ormond raised his hand for silence, and again I could hear the shrilling of the bitter wind that was never still. Then he said softly: "You are only exciting him, and had better go," and with a last glance at Grace's slender figure stooping beside the bed I went out softly.

It was nearly midnight and a cold creepiness pervaded everything when he joined the rest of us round the stove.

"Gone!" he said simply. "Just clenched his hand and died. There was some fine material wasted in that man. Well, I think he was wronged somehow, and I'm sorry for him."

We turned away in silence, for a shadow rested upon Carrington, while the outlaw lay in state in the homestead he had helped to rob, until the Northwest Police bore what was left of him away. But before that time we rode back to Fairmead.

CHAPTER IX

A RECKONING

IT was some time after the holding up of Carrington Manor before I was able, with Jasper's assistance, to fulfill my promise to Minnie Fletcher. Jasper knew everybody within fifty miles up and down the C. P. R. Line, and at least as far across the prairie, while they all had a good word for him. So when he heard the story he drove us over to Clearwater, where an elevator had been built beside the track, only to find that the agent in charge of it had already a sufficient staff. He, however, informed us that the manager of a new creamery wanted a handy man to drive round collecting milk from the scattered homesteads who could also help at the accounts and clerking. Such a combination might not have been usual in England, but in the Western Dominion one may find University graduates digging trenches and unfortunate barristers glad to earn a few dollars as railroad hands.

"I guess we'll fix him up in that creamery," said Jasper. "The man who runs it was raised not far from the old folks' place in Ontario," and we started forthwith on an apparently endless ride across the frozen prairie. Some of our horses are not much to look at, and others are hard to drive, but the way they can haul the light wagons or even the humble ground sleigh along league after league would surprise those not used to them. We spent one night with a Highland crofter in a dwelling that resembled a burrow, for most of it was underground, but the rammed earth walls kept out the cold and the interior was both warm and

clean. We spent another in somewhat grim conviviality at the creamery, for the men whose fathers hewed sites for what are now thriving towns out of the bush of Ontario are rather hard and staunch than sprightly.

Still, the manager did his best for us, and said on parting, "Send him right along. I'll give any friend of yours a show if Jasper will vouch for him. Pay's no great thing as yet, but he can live on it, and if we flourish he'll sail ahead with us."

So we brought Thomas Fletcher out from Winnipeg by joint subscription, and it cost us rather more than we cared about, for he came second class, while at that time Harry and I would have traveled "Colonist," or on opportunity would have earned our passage by tending stock. If we could spare a dollar in those days we wanted it for our land. The old jauntiness had gone out of Fletcher. He looked worn and thinner, with, I fancied, signs of indulgence in alcohol, but he professed his willingness to work hard at anything that would keep a roof over Minnie's head. We drove him across to the creamery, and the manager seemed disappointed when he saw him, while on the journey home Jasper said:

"I've been sizing up that young man. Strikes me he's too much like the trash you British are over-fond of dumping on to us. Why can't your people understand that if a man's a dead failure over there we don't want him? Dare say he's honest, but he's got no sand. Let that fellow sit up and talk over a glass of rye whiskey and a bad cigar and he's right there; set him wrestling with a tough job and he'll double up."

Jasper posed as a judge of character, and I felt inclined to agree with him. Fletcher had not the appearance of a vicious or dishonest man, but I fancied under pressure of circumstances he might become one.

We built a new stable and barn that winter, hauling suitable logs — and they were very hard to find — ten miles across the prairie, while Harry nearly lost his hands by frost-bite bringing in one load. Nevertheless, and there is leisure in that season, we drove over now and then to Fletcher's humble dwelling beside the creamery, and were both embarrassed the first time Minnie thanked us with tears in her eyes. Already she was recovering her good looks and spirits, but as Fletcher's pay would be scanty until spring the odd bags of potatoes and flour we brought them were evidently acceptable. We had received help freely when we needed it, and it seemed only fitting that now we should help others in turn; so we did what little we could, and, as transpired later, it brought trouble on us. Also we managed to pay a few visits to other neighbors who lived at any distance within thirty miles, including a few farms of the Carrington group, where, perhaps especially for Harry's sake, they made us welcome, and we went twice to Carrington Manor. The second visit was a memorable one.

It was a still, starlit night with an intense frost and a few pale green streamers shimmering in the north, but the big main room of the Manor with its open fireplace and central stove was very warm and snug. Our team was safely stabled, for owing to the distance we could not well return that night, and since the affair with the cattle thieves Colonel Carrington had so far as in him lay been cordial. He sat beside the glowing birch logs, silent and stern of aspect as usual, with a big shaggy hound which I had seen roll over a coyote with a broken spine curled up against his knee, while the firelight flickered redly across his lean, bronzed face. Opposite sat his sister, who partly resembled him, though in her case the Carrington dignity was softened by a winning sympathy. She was an old maid of a fine but

perhaps not common type, white-haired and stately, and in all things gracious.

Harry, who was a favorite of hers, knelt with one knee on a wolf-skin rug, turning over a collection of photographs on a low table that she might see, and she smiled at some of his comments. Ormond leaned against the wall behind them interposing whimsical sallies, and casting occasional glances toward Grace and myself. Resigning his commission, he had lately, we understood, purchased land near the Manor. One or two other of the Colonel's subjects also were present. Being lighted with shaded lamps that shed their soft radiance only where it was wanted, portions of the long room remained in shadow, so Grace and I, sitting near one window, could look out between the looped-back curtains across the prairie. High over the sweep of dimly glimmering snow hung a vault of fathomless indigo. It was not such a sky as one sees in England, but rather a clear transparency where the stars, ranged one behind the other, led the gaze back and lost it in infinity, while at intervals a steely scintillation flickered up from horizon to zenith and then back again. Feathery frost-flowers on the window framed the picture like a screen of delicate embroidery.

I do not think either of us said much, but I felt that we had a kindred interest in the spectacle. Within there was warmth and light and life; outside, impressive silence reigned unbroken, with the coldness of the grave. Yet there was one man who, poorly nourished and still more poorly clad, had the courage to cross long leagues of frozen prairie on foot, for presently we heard a knocking at the door, and after an altercation with somebody outside a stranger walked with uneven steps into the room. White crystals sprinkled his old English coat, a most inadequate protection against such weather, while his breath was frozen about the collar, and the fur cap he could scarcely hold in

one stiffened hand was of the cheap and rubbishly description that Jew peddlers retail to the new arrival in Winnipeg. His age might have been fifty, but he had been bent by toil or sickness, and his pinched face was a study in itself. Anxiety, suspense, and fierce determination seemed written on it.

"I'm wanting Ralph Lorimer, who came out from England. They told me he was here," he said, and clutched at the table, for, as often happens, the change of temperature had been too much for him.

Then I recollected what Jasper, who had been in to Winnipeg, told me a day or two before. "I looked in at the Tecumseh House, and the clerk mentioned that a wild man from the old country had been asking for you. Wouldn't answer any questions; a lunatic of some sort, the clerk reckoned."

Nevertheless, as I stood up by the window I had no suspicion of the truth, though perhaps Harry had, for, drawing forward a chair, he said: "Feeling dizzy, are you not? Better sit down. But before we answer I should like to know who you are, and what you want with him."

"What has that to do with thee?" was the fierce answer. "I'm wanting Ralph Lorimer, and if he's alive in Canada I'll find him!"

I stepped out into the lamplight, saying: "You need not search far. With your permission, Miss Carrington! Now I am only a guest here. Will you follow me?"

The drawn face twitched, his left hand was clenched, and the other fumbled inside the breast of the threadbare coat as the old man turned to meet me.

"No; here before them all I'll ask thee," he said hoarsely. "I'm Adam Lee of Stoney Clough. Where's my daughter, Minnie Lee, that left her home to follow thee?"

The words seemed to break in on the warmth and harmony like a blast of Arctic cold, and sudden silence followed them. Colonel Carrington leaned forward with an angry glitter in his eyes, Miss Carrington watched me in cold surprise, and Grace — well, I do not care to recall her face. Once afterward I saw her look the same, and was thankful that her scornful glance rested on another man. Then, while I stood bolt upright, staring at the speaker, and wondering how I could make the matter plain, others intervened, for Ormond, turning toward Colonel Carrington, said:

"I fancy, sir, this is not the place for — er —such explanations. They might prove embarrassing."

Colonel Carrington glanced at his sister, who followed by the rest had already risen from her chair, beckoning to Grace, but Harry broke in.

"I agree with Captain Ormond in part," he said, "but this is a serious matter. We have all unfortunately heard the charge, and in fairness to Mr. Lorimer we should hear him refute it. It's either a cruel mistake, sir, or gratuitous malice, and I would stake my last dollar on his honor. A few words will suffice."

It was a kindly thought of Harry's, and the Colonel nodded.

"You will excuse us, Jessy," he said. "Geoffrey, as a matter of fairness he is perfectly right. Now, sir, for the space of two minutes will you restrain your impatience and follow us?"

Adam Lee of Stoney Clough, however, thought differently. I had never seen him before, but I knew him well by reputation; for, though not born there, he was one of the erratic ultra-reformers one may find in many an English industrial town. They have left all regular creeds and parties behind, and look for the regeneration of an iniquitous

world by some fantastic new religion, or the subversion of all existing authorities. Some, it is true, live lives of self-denial, and die, worn out by disappointment, of a broken heart, but the rest develop into fanatics of savage bigotry.

"No! I've followed him weary and hungry for many days," he said. "He doesn't leave my sight until he has answered me. Stop! you that sit warm in luxury, pampering your sinful bodies and grinding the poor, you shall hear what one of your kind has done, and judge between us. The tale will be good for you. Shall the rich rob us of our children, as they rob us of our bread?"

He flung out one arm as he spoke, and there was a rude power in voice and gesture that commanded attention. Neither was his accent now altogether that of Lancashire, for Lee, as is not uncommon, would sometimes speak a purer English than the local vernacular. Miss Carrington glanced past him toward the door, irresolute, and Grace leaned forward staring at him as though fascinated, while perhaps I of all the others found the sentiment familiar. It was the same spirit which, trammeled by poverty and ignorance, stirs many a man weary of a hopeless struggle for better things, and blazes into strange coruscations of eloquence in market-square orations and from the platforms of conventicles where men whose religion is a thing of terror worship the jealous God of the Hebrews.

"Nay, sit still and hear." The words fell as though they were an order. "I am a poor man, a maker of shoes for the poor who could not always buy them, and I had one daughter. She was all I had, and I wrestled with the devil for her that she might escape perdition through the snare of beauty. But the nephew of a rich man cast desiring eyes upon her, and Satan helped him. He might well be strong and comely, for he fed on the finest, while when trade was bad half of us went cold and hungry in Stoney

Clough; but he was filled with the wiles of the devil and the lusts of the flesh, so when there were plenty of his own kind to choose among he tempted the poor man's daughter who worked for a pittance in his uncle's mill. Her mother died; they mocked me at the chapel; and I have come four thousand miles to find him, but now and here he shall answer. Ralph Lorimer of Orb Mill, where is Minnie Lee?"

His hand was clear of the threadbare coat now; something glinted in it, and I looked into the muzzle of a pistol. But Geoffrey Ormond, in spite of his surface languidness, was quick of thought and action, and with swift dexterity gripped his right arm from behind. Then, and we were never quite sure how it happened, though the weapon was evidently a cheap Belgian revolver, and perhaps the hammer shook down, there was a ringing crash, a cry from Grace, a tinkle of falling glass, and Adam Lee stood empty-handed, while Ormond, who flung down the smoking weapon, said coolly:

"It is safer with me. These things are dangerous to people who don't understand them, and you may be thankful that, without perhaps intending it, you are not a murderer."

"Thank you, Geoffrey," said Colonel Carrington. "Lee, sit down. I don't know what your religious or political crazes are, and it doesn't matter, but I have rather more power here than an English magistrate, and if you move again, by the Lord I'll send you in irons to Winnipeg for attempted murder. Mr. Lorimer, I am not inclined to thank you, but if you have any explanation you had better give it to him."

Lee, I learned, was a fearless man, with the full courage of his somewhat curious convictions, but there were few who could withstand Colonel Carrington, and, half-dazed,

half-savage, he did his bidding, while again every eye in the room was turned upon me.

"Minnie Lee was certainly employed in my uncle's mill in Lancashire," I said slowly, "but on my word of honor nothing ever passed between us that all the world might not hear. She married a former clerk there, one Thomas Fletcher, secretly, and at present lives with him at the Willow Lake creamery. I met her for the first time in Canada at the Elktail hotel, where she was a waitress, and at her request helped to find her husband the situation. She promised to write home, but evidently did not do so."

"It is perfectly true," said Harry. "I was present at that meeting. If our visitor has any doubts on the subject he has only to ride over there and see."

Lee gasped for breath, recovered himself, and strode toward me with fingers trembling and his eyes blood-shot.

"Is it true?" he said. "I know thy vain pride in an honor that can stoop to steal the honor of the poor; it is only women to whom thy kind tell lies. Here, before these witnesses, tell me again, is it Gospel true?"

He seemed half-crazed by excitement and over-fatigue, while his relief was evidently tempered by a fear that we might yet be bent on duping him; but I pitied him in all sincerity, for whatever were his foibles it was evident that this broken-down wreck of humanity with the warped intellect loved his daughter, and as I wondered what would most quickly set his mind at rest Harry said stiffly:

"We do not lie to any one, and we are poor men, too. At least we work for a bare living harder than many English poor. On his friend's word as — well, in deference to your prejudices, we'll say an honest man — Mr. Lorimer has told you nothing but the truth. You will find Mrs. Fletcher safe and well at the Willow Lake creamery."

"Then I'm going there now," was the answer. "I thank thee for the story. No, I don't want the pistol. It was the devil tempted me to bring it, but it was only to force the truth from him, and it went off of itself."

"You are somewhat premature," said Colonel Carrington. "We haven't quite done with you. As I said, I hold myself responsible for the peace of Carrington, and though I am inclined to believe it was an accident, you can't ride twenty miles hungry at midnight. You came here without my invitation, and you have customs of your own, but you'll certainly get lost and frozen on the prairie if you leave this house before to-morrow morning."

They stood facing each other, a curious contrast, the pinched and bowed cobbler and the army officer, but there was the same stubborn pride in both; for with a quaint dignity, which in some measure covered its discourtesy, the former made answer in the tongue of the spinning country:

"I thank thee, but I take no favors from the rich. Thou and the others like thee have all the smooth things in this life, though even they cannot escape the bitterness that is hidden under them. Well, maybe thou'lt find a difference in the next. Good night to thee."

He marched out, and we heard the door crash to.

"I dare say he is right," the Colonel said, with a curious smile. "At times I almost hope we will. An interesting character, slightly mad, I think; heard of such people, but I never met them."

This was evidently true, for the lot of Colonel Carrington had not been cast among the alleys of a spinning town where the heavens are blackened by factory smoke, and as the silver value changes in the East there is hunger among the operatives. In such places the mind of many a thinking man, worn keen as it were by poor living, sickened by foulness and monotony, makes fantastic efforts to reach

beyond its environment, and occasionally hurries its owner to the brink of what some call insanity, and perhaps is not so.

Then one lonely and pathetic figure, with bent head and shambling gait, grew smaller down the great white waste of prairie.

"I am very sorry for him," Grace said, "but the poor old man will never reach Willow Lake on foot, even if he could find the way. He must have walked many miles already, and he will be frozen before morning. Some one must go after him."

"If you will allow us, Miss Carrington, I think we had better take our leave and drive him there on our homeward way. I am sorry that all this happened under your roof," I said. "Harry, we must hurry before we lose him;" and Colonel Carrington answered coldly.

"I am inclined to agree with you."

Brief leavetakings followed. Miss Carrington was cordial, but, and it may have been exaggeration of sentiment, I dare not look at Grace with the shadow of such a charge hanging over me. Neither, I think, did the Colonel shake hands with me; and when the sleigh sped hissing down the beaten trail Harry said:

"Ralph, you almost make one angry. Of course, she is too high for you; but there was no reason you should look like a convicted felon when we took the trouble to demonstrate your innocence. Confusion to Thomas Fletcher and all his works, I say! Why should that invertebrate wastrel have turned up to plague us so?"

Some time had elapsed before we got the horses harnessed, because they objected strenuously, and several branching trails crossed the prairie, so we spent a much longer time than I liked in driving through the bitter cold before we found my late accuser sitting under a copse of willows, and apparently awaiting his death. As the settlers say

when it freezes on the prairie, you can't fool with that kind of cold. Harry for some reason swore profanely.

"Get in, and we'll take you straight to Willow Lake," he said, lifting the unfortunate man, who already had almost lost the use of his limbs, and who answered with his teeth chattering:

"You two are very good; I couldn't drag myself further; walked there from Elktail to-day, and I felt main drowsy. What brought thee after me? From one of thy sort I never expected it."

"I don't care what you expected," said Harry briefly, "so you needn't trouble to tell me. Get into these furs here before you freeze to death; another half-hour would have made an end of you."

The team already had traveled far that day, but they responded gallantly to Harry's encouragement. The cold bit deep, however, and I could scarcely move a limb when, toward midnight, with a hiss of runners and a jingle of bells, we came into sight of Fletcher's shanty by Willow Lake. As luck would have it a light still shone in the window, and he opened the door when Harry and I made shift to draw some wrappings over the team. It grieved me to leave the poor beasts waiting there, for I found it difficult even to speak.

"It's Mr. Lorimer, Minnie," Fletcher shouted; and before I could intervene a woman's shape filled the lighted door, while Harry said softly, "Confound it! I hoped to have got out before the play commenced."

"We have brought you a visitor, Minnie," I said. "You must not be surprised. There's nothing too strange to happen in a new country. Harry, help me with him;" and between us we half carried Lee inside, for all the strength had gone out of him. The hot room reeled about me, and there was a drumming in my head, but with an

effort, I said, "It's your father, Minnie. You forgot the letter, and he came over to Carrington in search of me."

She dropped the stove-iron in her hand with a startled cry. Fletcher blinked at us stupidly, and the old man sat down with one elbow on the table and his head drooping forward limply, while for a moment or two afterward no one moved, and the ticking of a nickeled clock almost maddened me. Then the woman came forward timidly with the word "Father" on her lips, and Lee, groaning as though in pain, checked her with a gesture, "Who is this man here, lass?" he said.

"My husband, Thomas Fletcher; you ought to remember him. We were married before I left home," she said.

Harry coughed, while Lee said hoarsely: "I thank the Lord for it; lass, thou hast acted cruelly, but we'll say no more of that. I've left all I had to find thee, and now I'm only glad."

There were tears in Minnie's eyes as she leaned over him with one arm round his shoulder, but I fancied there was a flash of resentment in them too.

"If you had listened that night before you said what you did, all might have been different," she answered. "But I'm so glad to see you, and hungry for news. How did you leave mother, and the shop? I don't care to hear about the chapel."

"Thy mother is dead. The Lord took her," the old man answered solemnly, though as yet the warmth brought only pain to him. "I'll hear no word against the chapel. Nay," as the woman straightened herself with a cry, "she grieved sorely; but it was the typhoid, and to the last she would hear no ill of thee. The shop, I sold it; and maybe there's harness to mend, and saddles, that will earn my bread in this country. I'm an old broken man, and a little will content me. A weary time of struggle and black shame

I've suffered for thee; but now there's nought that matters when I find thee so."

"We must go," I said. "Our team is freezing and we can't afford to lose it;" and Minnie, touching her father, said, "You should thank Mr. Lorimer. Forty miles at least he has driven to-day, and there's another fifteen before him;" but ere he could turn I bundled Harry out of the door, and two minutes later we were flying across the prairie.

"I'm sorry for the old man," said Harry. "Fletcher didn't look delighted, and perhaps it's not to be wondered at. As to Minnie, she'll probably cry over him all night; but I hardly fancy she has quite forgiven him. It's not a nice thing, either, when you think of it. And I suppose it cost the old fanatic a fearful wrench to give up what he considered his mission to reform that benighted town. Lord, what fools — it's true — we mortals are."

I was too drowsy and cold to answer, and how we got the team into the stables or even found Fairmead I do not remember; but we probably did it by force of habit, and it was high noon the next day before we awakened.

CHAPTER X

A FORWARD POLICY

GRACE and I met often again before the thaw in spring put an end to all thoughts of amusement. Each time she seemed to place me on a more friendly footing, and I laid myself out to cultivate the good-will of the Carrington settlers, in the hope of meeting her at their gatherings, for they at least enjoyed themselves during the winter. Some of the younger gallants regarded me with evident hostility; but I could afford to smile at them, because, though the heiress of Carrington was gracious to all, she seemed to find more pleasure in my company than in their attentions. Still, at last even Harry grumbled when, half-frozen and with a worn-out team, I reached Fairmead at dawn. "We'll want another pair of horses if this is to continue," he said. "Ralph, it's not my business, but I'm afraid you are laying up trouble for yourself."

There were, however, disappointments, for now and then I drove long leagues through whirling snow or bitter frost only to find that Grace was not present, and it was on one of these occasions that I betrayed my secret to her aunt, Miss Carrington. She had been visiting an outlying farm, and though there were others upon whom the duty devolved I insisted on driving her home. In my case it was an inestimable privilege, for by good fortune Grace might be waiting to welcome her. I had been silent all evening, and when with a hissing beneath the steel runners and a rhythmic beat of hoofs we swept on under radiant

moonlight, Miss Carrington made some jesting comment upon it. Perhaps the exhilarating rush through the cold, still air had stirred me into undue frankness, for I answered:

"Grace was not there, and nothing seems the same without her. She brings an atmosphere of brightness with her, and one learns to miss it. What would this prairie look like if a cloud obscured the moon?"

Miss Carrington smiled a little, glancing at me keenly, as she said: "A pretty simile! It was more than I expected after your rueful looks to-night. But you are not singular. There are others in the Carrington settlement who think the same — young men with many rich acres and wealthy kinsfolk behind them at home."

Her voice changed, and I think the last part was intended to have its meaning, but a sudden impulse overcame my reason, and I answered rashly:

"That may well be, but there are none among them who would work or starve for her as I should. I am only a poor settler, but with one purpose always before him a determined man may accomplish much. However, I didn't mean to tell you or any one this until — my partner and I have accomplished something; and yet perhaps I have said too much not to finish."

Miss Carrington moved in her wrappings so that she could meet my eyes, but when I returned her gaze steadily it was a relief to find sympathy rather than anger in her face.

"I think you have," she said, with gentleness.

So, tightening my grip on the reins, I continued doggedly: "Then, even at the risk of seeming a presumptuous fool, you shall hear it all. This new land is for the strong and enterprising, who will stake their best on success within it, and with the hope I have before me I must succeed. So

while brain and sinew hold out neither drought, nor frost, nor hardship shall turn me aside until — until I am more equal in worldly possessions with Colonel Carrington. Others have risen from obscurity to hold many acres, and somehow I feel that I shall do so too. But if I owned half the Dominion it would be little to offer Miss Carrington, and without her my present holding would content me." Then I ended slowly, "I wonder whether, even in that case, there would be any chance for me?"

My companion's face was grave under the moonlight, but she touched my arm with a friendly gesture, as she answered: "Those are a young man's words, and I suppose some would call them foolish; but though I am old I like the spirit in them. After all, even in these days, we have not done with romance, and a stout heart is often better than land and property. Grace is like you in many ways; she takes life seriously, and I fancy she sees, as I do, that some of us are spending our best on pleasure in Carrington. My brother is a stern, proud man, and yet, as you say, the good things come to those who can fight and wait for them. More I cannot tell you."

"Thank you, Miss Carrington," I answered, feeling that for ever afterward she had made me her servant. "Now, please forget it all until some day I say the same thing to Colonel Carrington; and forgive me for ever telling you," but her eyes were troubled as she turned her face away.

We reached the manor safely, but I caught no glimpse of Grace, and Colonel Carrington hardly troubled to thank me, while Harry pitied the team when I led it into our stable. A few days afterward, when we spent all of one afternoon discussing finances and our program for spring, he agreed with me when, contrary to my usual caution, I suggested that we should make a plunge that year by purchasing a gang-plow and hiring more horses, then, giving a

bond on the homestead and expected crop, sink the last dollar we could raise in sowing the utmost acreage and breaking more sod on the free land we had pre-empted. There was a sporting instinct in Harry which made him willing to run risks that I generally should have avoided.

Now, however, I was bent on playing a bold game, trusting in the axiom that those who nothing venture cannot expect to win. Also, on the prairie the credit system is universal, and though some abuse it, it has its advantages. For instance, the settler may obtain seed, implements, and provisions on a promise to pay with interest after harvest, and thus he is enabled to break an extra quantity of virgin soil. If the crop is good all benefit alike — dealer, maker of implements, and grower of wheat; while if the grain fails, instead of one man to bear it there are several to divide the loss.

So we pledged our credit up to the hilt, and, though at times I grew grave as I wondered what would happen if there should be hail or frost, we commenced work in earnest with the first of the thaw, and drilled in grain enough to leave us an ample profit if all went well. Then we would double our sowing next year, and, so Harry said, in a few seasons rise to affluence. It was a simple program, and fortunes have been made in that way; but, as we were to find, it also leads occasionally to disaster.

It was a gray day in spring, and a cold wind swept the grasses as I stood beside the double yoke of oxen and the great breaker-plow, when Colonel Carrington, who was passing that way, rode toward me across the prairie. While I wondered what his errand might be, I saw two mounted figures outlined against the somber sky on the crest of a distant rise, whom I recognized as Grace and Captain Ormond. The Colonel rode a splendid bay horse, and after the first greeting he sat looking down at me ironically

awhile, erect, soldierly, and immaculately neat down to the burnished stirrups and the toes of his speckless boots. In no circumstances did the Colonel forget that he once commanded a famous regiment, and now ruled drastically over Carrington, while I must have appeared a sufficiently homely object, in battered slouch hat and torn blue overalls, with the mire clinging to my leggings.

"You are staking heavily on the weather this year; I wonder what for," he said, glancing down the long furrows, and I felt there was a warning in it, for this man seldom wasted words. "The last time I passed it struck me that you had better, as they say here, go slow and not risk a surety on the chance of what you can never attain. It takes capital to farm on a large scale, you know. By the way, I came to tell you that we will not want the disc-harrows, so you can keep them until your work is finished, and as Miss Carrington — Miss Grace Carrington — is going to England shortly we shall be occupied with preparation for some time. This will save you from wasting precious hours riding over just now in the busy season. Well, I must join the others. Good-day to you."

He wheeled his horse with a parting salutation, a slender figure waved a hand to me from the crest of the rise before it sank below the sky-line, and that was the last I saw of Grace Carrington for many a day, while breathing hard I watched the horseman grow smaller across the prairie. Her father sometimes delighted to speak in metaphor, and I could not fail to recognize that it was a plain hint he had, perhaps in grim kindness, given me. For a moment I wondered whether I should have made him listen in turn, and I was glad I had not, for his words stung me like a whip, and it would not have helped matters if I had spoken my mind to him. Then, shaking myself together, I called to the oxen, reflecting that many a formerly poor

man had married the daughter of even a greater man than Colonel Carrington, while if it were a matter of land and money that divided us, every extra furrow brought me so much nearer to her. Still, I was graver than usual, even until the plowing was done, and Harry, not knowing the reason, commented satirically upon it.

The thaw came early that year, and the latter snow had been light, while steady dry weather followed it, and there were times when I felt that I should have given several years of my life for rain. It came, and, though there was not much of it, as if by magic tender grain stood a handbreadth above the black loam, while I watched it lengthen daily with my heart in my eyes, and I grew feverishly anxious about the weather. Many things depended on the success of that crop. Then suddenly it was summer, the hottest summer for ten seasons, our neighbors said, and I wondered how we would manage to cut hay for our own beasts, and the teams we had purchased conditionally, because long grass was scanty. Assistance was equally scarce, for, seeing us reach out toward prosperity, our friends evidently considered that we were now well able to help ourselves.

It was done somehow, though often for a week together we worked all day and most of the night, until there was only an hour or two left before the dawn, and I lay wide awake, too overstrung and fatigued to sleep. Once, too, in the burning heat of noon I fell from the wagon in a state of limp collapse, and there were occasions when Harry, with a paler color than usual, lay for long spaces gasping in the shade. We could spare little time for cooking, or a tedious journey to bring in provisions, so when one thing ran out we made shift with the rest. Still, we observed Sunday, and once Harry laughed as he said: "I'm thankful there is a Fourth Commandment, for without it we should

have caved in utterly. Do you know we've been living on potatoes, tea, and porridge every meal for the last ten days? It's doubtful whether we can hold out until harvest, and you'll remember it's then that the pace grows killing."

For the first time I noticed that his face was very thin under the sun-burn, and perhaps he read my thoughts, for he laughed.

"We have taken on too big a contract, Ralph," he said, "but once in we'll carry it through. Still, I wish I had been born with the frame of a bullock, like you."

I lay in a hide chair ten hours together that Sunday, only moving to light the stove for Harry, or to consume another pint of strong green tea, which is generally our sole indulgence on the prairie. It might not, however, have suited fastidious palates, because the little squirrel-like gophers which abounded everywhere, burrowing near by, fell into the well by scores, and we had no leisure to fish them out. Neither is there any mistaking the flavor of gopher extract. Meantime it grew hotter and drier, and I had to admit to myself that the crop might have been better, while Harry, to hide his misgivings, talked cheerfully about higher prices, until at last the crisis came.

I awoke one morning with an unusual feeling of chilliness, sprang upright, and saw that the first rays of the red sun scintillated upon something that was not dew among the grass. With a cry I strode over to Harry's berth. Even half-asleep he could read the fear in my face.

"What is it?" he asked.

I scarcely knew my own voice as I answered hoarsely: "Frost!"

We ran out half-dressed, and when we stood by the edge of the tall wheat, which was already turning yellow, we knew that the destroyer had breathed upon our grain, and that every stately head contained its percentage of

shriveled berries. Still, it might yet sell under a lower grading — if there were no more frost. But the frost came twice again — and on the third sunrise I stood staring across the blighted crop with despairing eyes, while my hands would tremble in spite of my will. Few men had labored as Harry and I had done; indeed, it was often only the hope of winning Grace Carrington that sustained me, while now I was poorer far than when first I landed in Canada. Neither dare I contemplate what the result of my folly would be to Harry. But Harry, who seldom thought of himself, laid his hand affectionately on my shoulder.

"Poor old Ralph!" he said. "Well, we did our best, and there's room for us somewhere in this wide country. I suppose it is — hopeless — absolutely?"

"Quite!" I answered, trying to steady my voice. "We can leave it with a clear conscience to the gophers. However, we might earn a little with the teams to feed us through the winter, and strike out next spring for British Columbia. The new railroad people are open to let track-grading contracts, you know. Lend me your double-barrel; I'm in no mood for talking, and an all-day tramp after prairie-chicken may help to steady me."

I took down the old weapon — it was a muzzle-loader — and called our little English terrier Grip. He was rather a nuisance than otherwise when stalking prairie-fowl, but he was an affectionate beast, and I felt glad of his company. Then for several hours I strode on across the prairie, hardly seeing the clattering coveys at which Grip barked furiously, and I might have wandered on until midnight but that when skirting a grove of willows he must most foolishly follow the trail of a coyote. Now, the prairie-wolf, though timorous enough where a man is concerned, is generally willing to try conclusions with even a powerful dog, and when presently a great snarling commenced I burst at

full speed through the willows. It was high time, for the coyote had pinned the terrier down, and there was barely opportunity to pitch up the gun and take a snapshot at its shoulder before my pet's struggles would have ended.

Then I ran in through the smoke to find that the wounded beast still held the hapless dog, and as the other barrel was empty I swung the butt aloft and brought it down crashing on its head. However, the coyote was not quite vanquished yet, for I felt its teeth almost meet in my leg, and I stumbled head foremost over it, after which for a few moments there was a mixed-up scuffle, until with one hand closing on the hairy throat I got another chance to bring down the gun-butt. Then the beast lay still, flecked all over with blood and foam, while my hands and clothes were torn, and there were crimson patches about me. Grip whined and licked my bleeding fingers when I lifted all that seemed left of him, and he presented a sorry spectacle. Nevertheless, for some curious reason that struggle had done me good, and, carrying the dog, I limped home with a wound in my leg, considerably more cheerful than when I started out. I even laughed as Harry, meeting me in the doorway, said, "Good heavens, Ralph, what have you been doing? You look like a butcher."

"It's a case of inherent savagery, a return to the instincts of barbaric days," I answered. "I've been killing a coyote with my hands, and I feel better for it. But don't ask questions; I'm almost famished."

We fared well that evening, for there was no need of hurry now, and when the meal was over we sat talking long in the little room. Already the nights were closing in and the coolness outside invigorated like wine, but we felt that the sight of the blighted wheat would not improve our spirits. So I stated my views as clearly as I could, ending with forced cheerfulness, though I meant every syllable of it:

"We are not beaten yet, and if we must go under we'll make at least another tough fight of it."

Meanwhile Harry covered several sheets of paper with figures.

"You are perfectly right," he said at last. "The homestead, stock, and implements will have to go; but I think we'll ask our largest creditors to give us time while we see what we can do at the track-grading. It's possible, but not likely, that we might earn enough to make some arrangement to commence again. However, to consider the probable, there'll be a meeting of creditors, and perhaps enough after the sale to buy us a Colonist ticket to British Columbia. Anyway, we'll ride out to-morrow and call on the road surveyor."

It may have been because we were young, or the suspense had brought its own reaction, but a faint hope commenced to spring up within us, and now, when at least we knew the worst, we were both more tranquil than we had been for the last three days, while I slept peacefully until Harry roused me with the news that breakfast was ready. We started at noon, and before the sun crossed the meridian the next day we found the surveyor busy beside the new steel road which stretched out across the prairie from the trunk line so many fathoms daily. He was a native Canadian, emphatic in gesture, curt in speech, with, as we say here, a snap about him, and he looked us over critically as I explained that we were willing to work for him. I fancied there was satisfaction in his gaze, and this was not unlikely, for we were both lean, hard, and bronzed, while our old stained canvas garments told their own tale of sturdy toil.

"Guess I could let you a track-grading contract," he said meditatively. "We find the scoops, you find the teams and take all risks, but it's pay up when you're

through. We've no use on this road for the men who when they strike a hard streak just throw up their contract."

"What we begin we'll finish," I answered with emphasis, while Harry smiled and raised a warning hand unseen by the surveyor. "Neither hard work nor hard luck is new to us, and if it weren't for the latter we shouldn't be here."

"Glad to hear it," said the surveyor, dryly, "you look like that. Well, here's the schedule; glance through it; then you can come back to-morrow and we'll sign the agreement. You'll have to rustle, though, and keep the rail-bed ready; this road's going right through to Green Lake before the winter."

I ran my eye down the list of stipulations respecting the work to be done at so much per rod, with allowance for extra depth scooped out through the rises per cubic ton, saw there should be a profit in it from what little I knew, and tossed the sheet to Harry, answering:

"Our time is precious, and if my partner is willing we'll sign it now. As to what we look like, I'll thank you to remember that has nothing to do with you."

"I apologize; meant it as a compliment," said our future employer, who was grimed thick with sweat and dust, and Harry answered lightly, "We are much obliged to you; my partner is quick in temper. However, you know that you can't get teams or men for love or money now when harvest's coming on, and so we're going to strike you for another two cents per measure."

"Might stretch that far," said the other after more figuring, "but somehow we'll take it out of you. Here, fill your distinguished names into this, and if you like to take it there's another lot — it's hauling in birch logs for stump piles and fencing purposes."

We signed both papers, and on leaving the surveyor we

found a man in old blue overalls, whose appearance suggested the Briton, waiting for us near the construction train which had just come up with its load of rails and rail-layers.

"Did you get the grading contract?" he asked; and, when Harry nodded, he continued: "Then as a preliminary I'll introduce myself, Ellsworthy Johnston, one-time barrister, and, as the surveyor classified me, general roustabout. Had a bush ranch in British Columbia and came to grief over it by fooling time away gold prospecting. Rode in and asked yonder eloquent autocrat for a contract, but he didn't see it. Said, and he explained it wasn't flattery, I looked too much of a gentleman, and in consequence if I liked I could shovel ballast at one dollar seventy-five daily. Now shoveling ballast grows monotonous, and one gets a confounded back-ache over it, so if you're agreeable I'll fling in a small sum and my services as junior partner."

"We're not too rich," said Harry, "and we'll talk it over."

"Get a move on there, Sam Johnsing, before the flies eat you! Guess the rails are growing rusty while you're resting," called somebody in authority, and with a smile of whimsical resignation our new acquaintance hurried away.

We made a bargain with him that evening, to the satisfaction of all concerned, and the next morning Harry rode away to divide our few head of stock among our neighbors and hire if possible one or two among those whose crops had also suffered from frost. The latter, like the devastating hail, performs its work erratically, wiping out one man's grain and sparing his neighbors'. Meanwhile I found plenty to do making arrangements to commence our work on the track.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE RAILROAD

IT was a hot autumn morning when we prepared to commence our task of railroad building, the last forlorn hope between ourselves and ruin. Harry and I stood each beside our teams, which were harnessed to a great iron scoop or scraper designed to tear out a heavy load of soil at each traverse. This we would pile in the slight hollows, so that, sinking a few feet through the rises and raised slightly above each depression, the road-bed might run straight and level across the prairie. A group of sinewy, dusty men waited about the line of flat cars loaded with rails close behind, while a plume of black smoke curled aloft from the huge locomotive in a dingy column against the blue of the sky. This, with the cluster of tents and shanties, was all that broke the white grass-land's empty monotony.

The surveyor, who was perhaps dustier than any, leaned against the engine's buffer-frame close beside me, mopping his face, which was also smeared with soot, and surveyed us complacently, for with our assistants we formed, as far as outward appearances went, a workmanlike if somewhat disreputable company. Water was scarce that season and too precious to waste in superfluous washing, while we had little leisure to spare on even much-needed repairs to our garments. Still, we were alert, hard and eager, while after the preceding anxiety it was with improved spirits that we found definite work before us, with, what was better still, definite pay at the end of it.

"Well, they've finished the line posts; I guess you can start in," said the surveyor. "You look as if you could keep those scoops from rusting. Good luck go with you! Stir round and heave those rails down, boys!"

Then with a crack of whips we started, and it was with satisfaction that I heard the trampling of hoofs bite into the sod and the bright steel edges rip through the matted roots. Soft earth and tangled grasses filled the iron scoop behind, the air vibrated with the strident clang of rails, and the locomotive engineer performed an inspiriting solo upon his whistle, while the rest of our party followed to finish the wake we left with their shovels. Somewhat improved appliances are used in railroad building now, but though it had limitations the scraper did excellent work in its day. All went well and smoothly for at least a month, and our hearts grew lighter every day, while each time the big locomotive came clattering up we had another length of road-bed ready for the rails, and the surveyor commented on our progress with frank approval. He also did so to some purpose in his reports to Winnipeg, as subsequently transpired, while occasionally, when we lounged languidly contented under the dew-damped canvas at nights, Harry would figure with the end of a pencil how much we had already placed to our credit.

"We are doing well, Ralph," he said the last time it happened, with a smile that lighted his sunny face. "There's enough now to pay off those people in Brandon, and with luck we'll manage to settle with the worst of the rest before the frost comes. It's almost a pity we didn't try the railroad sooner, but"— and here he glanced at me with a twinkle in his eye —"we came out to work our own land, and it's your intention to add acre to acre until Fairmead's one of the biggest farms in the Territories, isn't it?"

"Yes," I answered soberly. "God willing, if health and strength hold out," and in his own expressive way Harry shook hands with me. Harry's hand harmonized with the rest of him, and hands as well as faces are characteristic of their owners' temperament. It was small and shapely, one might call it almost feminine, but its touch conveyed the subtle impression of courage and nervous energy, while I wondered what the woman who reared him would think if she saw those toughened and ingrained fingers now. Neither were words needed, for Harry's actions had each their meaning, and that grasp seemed to say that in this I was leader and whatever happened he would loyally follow me. Then he added softly:

"Yes — with your reservation — we will do it."

Uninterrupted good fortune seldom lasts long, however, or at least it seldom did with us, and presently the line ran into a big coulée which wound through what we call hills on the prairie — that is to say, a ridge of slightly higher levels swelling into billowy rises. In the Western Dominion the rivers, instead of curving round the obstacles they encounter, generally go through, though whether they find the gorges or fret them out is beyond me. In the latter case, judging from what one sees in British Columbia, they must have worked hard for countless centuries. The hollow as usual was partly filled with birches and willows, which hampered us, for they must be cut down and the roots grubbed up; and when at last we had scooped a strip of road-bed out of the slanting side it seemed as if disaster again meant to overtake us.

Autumn had melted into Indian summer, but it was still hot. With the perspiration dripping from me one afternoon, I whirled and drove the keen axe into a silver birch's side, seldom turning my eyes from the shower of white chips, because looking up between the slender stems one

could see the black smoke of a thrasher streaking the prairie. The crops of the man who employed it had escaped damage, and as those of many had been spoiled by frost I knew he would reap a handsome profit on every bushel. I did not grudge it him, but the contrast with our failure troubled me. My throat was parched and dried up, for we had finished all the water they brought us in by train, and no man could drink of the shrunken creek, which was alkaline. It flowed down from one of those curious lakes to be found on the Western prairie, where clouds of biting dust which smarts one's eyes and nostrils intolerably rise up like smoke from the white crust about the margin of the waters, whose color is a vivid greenish blue.

I stepped aside a moment to let the construction train with its load of rails roll past, and stood leaning on the axe wiping the perspiration out of my eyes until Harry's shout rang out warningly. Then through the strident scream of brakes and the roar of blown-off steam an ominous rumbling commenced round a bend; there was a rush of flying footsteps, and Harry shouted again. I ran forward down the newly-laid track, and when I halted breathless, my first sensation was one of thankfulness followed by dismay. Harry was struggling to hold an excited team not far away. It was evident that he and the rest were safe, but it was also equally plain that we must gather our courage to meet another blow. In no circumstances could much, if any, profit have been made on that portion of the line which traversed the coulée, but we took it with the rest; and now the road-bed we had painfully scooped out had been swept away and lay a chaotic mass of débris, some sixty yards below, for, loosened by the excavation, the side of the ravine had slipped down bodily.

"I'm glad you and the teams are safe," was all I could

find to say when Harry met me, for I struggled against an inclination to do either of two things. One was to sit down and groan despairingly, and the other to abuse everything on the Canadian prairie.

Harry at first said nothing. He was panting heavily, but another man answered for him:

"I guess you might be, and only for your partner's grit the teams wouldn't have been saved. When we saw the whole blame ravine tumbling in the only thing that struck us was to light out quick, and we did it in a hurry, not stopping to think. Something else struck your partner, too, a devastatin' load of dirt coming down on the teams, and he went back for them. Cut the traces of one scraper — you can see the blame thing busted in the bottom there; then there was a roar and she came down solid with a rush, while we did the shouting when he brought them safe at a gallop out of the dust."

"That's a side issue," said Harry very gravely, "and the main one is serious. Ralph, if all this slope is going to slip down it means disaster to us. You see, after what was said when we took the contract, we couldn't well back out of it, even if we wanted to. Hallo, here's his majesty the surveyor on his trolley."

With a clatter of wheels the light frame raced down the slight incline, and unloaded its occupants violently when it ran into the back of the construction train which they had stopped just in time. We did not, however, follow it, because we wanted time to think; and both our faces were anxious when the surveyor returned.

"I'm afraid it's a hard case — one of those things no man can figure on ahead — give you my word we never expected this," he said. "That bank looked solid enough, but there's more of it just waiting to go, and the whole track will

have to be set back several yards or so. Anyway, it's particularly hard on you. Remembering what I told you, have you settled yet what you are going to do?"

"Yes," I answered slowly. "We made the agreement, and we mean to keep it. We'll hire more men and teams if what we have won't do. Somehow we've got to finish our bargain, and get our money back, and we'll come to the end of the ravine some day. Isn't that your view, Harry?"

"Of course!" said Harry, as the surveyor turned in his direction. By this time we had fallen into our respective parts. When there was need of judicious speech or care in matters financial it was Harry's tact or calculations that solved the difficulty, while when it came to a hard grapple with natural difficulties I led the way. Again the surveyor glanced from one to the other before he said:

"There's grit in both of you. After all, what you think does not affect the question; a contract's a contract, and we hold the whip hand over you, but I'm glad to see you take it that way."

The surveyor, as we were to learn, was a man of discernment, and he may have been making an experiment, but my blood was up, and I answered stiffly:

"The whip hand has nothing to do with it. We will carry out our agreement, because we pledged ourselves to do so; if we hadn't, ten railroad companies would not make us, and we're open to defy any man in the Dominion, director or surveyor, to force an injustice upon us."

The autocrat was not in the least angry, and smiled dryly as he said: "I believe you. Well, I make no promises, but if you're not above all assistance I guess I might help you. You can lay off and rest your teams for two days anyway, while I turn loose the shovelers; then you'll want all the energy that's in you."

In different circumstances we might have enjoyed that

holiday. As it was, I lay still in the sunshine all day, disconsolately staring across the prairie down the track that was apparently going to complete our discomfiture, and smoking until my mouth was blistered. Where Harry went to I did not know. On the second evening, however, our new partner, who had been back to the main line for supplies, came in, and listened with apparent unconcern while we explained matters to him. Acting under impulse, I even suggested that we might release him from his unfortunate bargain, but he laughed as he answered:

"You're generous, but it can't be done. Experiences of this kind are not new to me, and I'm a Jonah, as I warned you. Still, when bad luck follows one everywhere — floods on the Fraser, cattle-sickness, snow coming heavy just when one is finding signs of gold — you know there's no earthly use running away from it, and it's wisest to laugh at fortune and stay right where you are. Dare say we'll come out on the right side yet; and if we don't, in fifty years it won't make much difference. Now try to look less like guests at a funeral, and talk of something cheerful."

I made some moody answer and envied him his way of taking things, while Harry tried to smile, and Johnston, lifting down a banjo, commenced a plantation ditty, which he sang with so much spirit that presently he had most of the shovel gang for an appreciative audience. Then there were roars of laughter when he stood in the entrance of the tent and, with the utmost solemnity, made them a ridiculous speech. After this they went away to their canvas dwellings, and I knew that Ellsworthy Johnston was one of those born soldiers of fortune who extract the utmost brightness from an arduous life, and, meeting each reverse with a smiling face, cheerfully bear their ill-rewarded share in the development of Greater Britain beyond the seas. One may find a good many of them on the Western prairie.

We recommenced work the next morning, and, under the delicious still coolness of the Indian summer, we increased the strain on nerve and muscle and cut down the grocery bill, though I insisted on feeding the horses even better than before. It is never economy to stint one's working cattle, especially when one demands the utmost from them, besides being a procedure which is distasteful to any merciful man. However, though we had to hire more horses, wondering how we would ever pay for them when the contract was finished, the track crept on along the treacherous slope, where we scooped out a double width as basis, winding among the birches in glistening, sinuous curves, while the end of the valley grew nearer every day. Again Harry and I lapsed into the excitement of a race against adversity, because unless we were well out on the open prairie before winter bound the sod into the likeness of concrete there could be no hope of even partly recouping our loss. Even Johnston seemed infected with our spirit; but while we generally worked in dogged silence, he had ever a jest on his lips.

One evening — and the days were shortening all too rapidly — when I sat tired and dejected on an empty provision case, a rail-layer brought in several letters, and, as usual, they were all for me. Harry stood bare-armed, with the dust still thick upon him, just outside the entrance of the tent, holding a spider over our little stove, and glanced half regretfully toward the budget. No one ever seemed to write to Harry. The first was from Jasper. He had visited Brandon and Winnipeg on business, and wrote in his usual off-hand style.

"I've been in to see those dealers, taking my best broker along, to convince them that we only raised solid men in this section," it ran. "Thought I'd enlighten them about you, and the broker laid himself out to back me. He gets all

my business — see? — while you can't beat a Winnipeg broker at real tall talking. I should say we impressed them considerably; or perhaps it was the big cigars and the spread at the hotel. Said they'd sense enough to know a straight man when they saw him, and they'd give you plenty time to pay in. So all you've got to do is to sail right on with the track-grading. The boys were saying down to Elktail that Fletcher and his father-in-law don't get on, and there's going to be trouble there presently. I think the old man started in to reform him, and Fletcher don't like unlimited reform."

"Just like Jasper," said Harry. "A woman's heart, and the strength of three ordinary men. Still, when Jasper starts in with a rush no man can say where he'll finish, and we may hear next that he has been all round Winnipeg on our account borrowing money."

Then the new partner, who was splitting firewood close by, laid down his axe as he said: "Hope you'll introduce me to Jasper some day. From what you say, he is a man worth knowing."

There were two more letters, and the next — my fingers trembled as I opened it — was from Grace. It was dated from Starcross House, in Lancashire, and written in frank friendliness, expressing regret for our misfortune, which, it seemed, she had heard about, and ending: "But by this time you will have learned that there are ups and downs in every country, and I know you both have the courage to face the latter. So go on with a stout heart, believing that I and all your other friends look for your ultimate success." To this there was a postscript: "I met your cousin, Miss Lorimer, the other day, and was sorry to find her very pale and thin. She had just recovered from a serious illness, and seemed troubled when I told her how you had lost your harvest."

I placed the thin sheets reverently in an inside pocket, and read them afterward over and over again, because I might not answer them. She had written out of kindly sympathy when the news of our trouble first reached her, and that was all; while I felt I could not write a mere formal note of thanks — and more than this was out of the question now. Nevertheless, I was thankful for her good wishes, and then I stood silent under the starlight, staring down the misty coulée and thinking of Cousin Alice as mechanically I stripped the envelope from the next letter. She had always been ailing, even in the days when we were almost as brother and sister; and now I longed that I might comfort her as in my periodical fits of restlessness she used to soothe me. That, however, was impossible, for my cousin was part of the sheltered life I had left behind across the sea, and I was in Western Canada with a very uncertain future before me.

Then, moving back into the light of the lamp, I read the last letter. With a gasp of astonishment, I handed it to Harry, saying: "I can make nothing of this. Who in the wide world can have sent the money?"

He laid down the spider, and, bending until the glow from the tent door fell on the paper, read:

"*Mr. Ralph Lorimer, of Fairmead.*

SIR,—We have received the sum of one thousand dollars, from a correspondent whose identity we are not at liberty to reveal, to place to your credit. If you prefer, you may regard this amount as an unsecured loan and repay it with current interest on opportunity. Otherwise it is unconditionally at your disposal, and we will have pleasure in honoring your drafts to that extent.

——— ———

Agent for the Bank of Montreal."

"You are a lucky man," said Harry. "What will you do with it?" And I answered with some hesitation:

"I don't exactly know. Tell them to send it back, most likely. We can both take care of ourselves without depending on other people's charity like remittance men. And what right has any unknown person to send money to me? My friends in England have apparently cast me off utterly, and in no case would I accept a favor from them. Still, I should like to discover who sent it."

"It's some one who knows your little — we'll say peculiarities," answered Harry dryly. "I sometimes wonder, Ralph, what makes you so confoundedly proud of yourself. Can't you take it in the spirit it's evidently meant, and be thankful? You are not overburdened with worldly riches at present, anyway."

To this I made no answer. We needed money badly enough — that at least was certain; and after our frugal repast I marched up and down the line, thinking it over, and then, chiefly for Harry's sake, I decided to accept the sum as a loan. It would materially help to lighten that other crushing load of debt; and though growing more and more puzzled, I felt, as Harry did, there was yet a great kindness behind it.

CHAPTER XII

THE UNEXPECTED

ON the first opportunity we paid off the most pressing of our creditors, and continued our labor with greater cheerfulness, working double tides when there was moonlight, scooping out the line along the sides of the coulée, though we lost more than I cared to calculate on every yard of it. As we did so the days grew shorter and shorter, and often in the mornings there was a keen frost in the air. It was a losing game, but we had given our bond and played it out stubbornly, while Johnston, who worked as hard as either now, cheered us with witty anecdote and quaint philosophy after each especially disappointing day. Then one evening when the surveyor sat with us, as he did occasionally, a man approached the tent.

"There's a curious critter hunting round for you," he said, "looks most like a low-down played-out Britisher. He's wanting Contractor Lorimer, and won't lie down until he finds him."

"Adam Lee of Stoney Clough for a dollar; I've been expecting him," said Harry, with a low whistle. "You needn't go, surveyor. Have you been fascinating any more young damsels, Ralph? Larry, will you be kind enough to show his reverence in."

The man grinned as he went out, and presently Lee stood before us. He looked a little stronger than when I last saw him, but there was trouble in his face, and, when I explained to the rest who he was, he sat down and com-

menced his story. Life is generally hard to such as he, and living close packed together in the hive of a swarming town, with their few joys and many sorrows open for every eye to see, they lose the grace of reticence.

"I set up a stitching shop in a shed against Tom Fletcher's house," he said. "There were none of my kin left in the wide world but Minnie, and, if I wasn't a burden, I wanted to live near her. They brought me saddles and harness to sew, and I earned a little, but I was main anxious for Thomas Fletcher. The lust of strong drink was in him, and he had sinful fits of temper, raging like one demented when I told him to cast out the devil. 'I'll cast out thee an' thy preaching into perdition,' he said. Then Minnie must tell me if I was too good for her husband, and only making trouble, they did not want me there, and I saw that sometimes Tom Fletcher scowled with angry eyes at her after I had spoken to him faithfully. So, because it is an ill thing to cause strife between man and wife, I left my daughter — and I had come half across the world to find her. They told me there were lots of men and horses working on the new railway, and I wondered if there was anything I could do that would keep me. They said Ralph Lorimer was a big contractor — an' there was doubt between us, but I have forgiven thee."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure!" said Harry. "The question is, however, what can you do?" and the old man answered eagerly:

"Anything, if it's saddles or harness or mending shoes. I can cut things in hardwood and sharpen saws too, and I'll work for a trial for nothing but my keep."

I looked down at him compassionately, for he was old and broken in spirit, and would plainly starve if turned adrift on the prairie, while as I did so the surveyor broke in:

"You had better take him!"

Then, deciding that perhaps he could help us in some small degree, and that we might spare a few dollars to give him, even if he only kept us in whole shoes, I answered: "Well, we'll see what you can do, and you can camp in the other tent. There's a set of worn-out harness for a beginning to-morrow; and if you go right across you'll just be in time for supper."

He thanked us with effusion, and when he went out Harry said lightly: "We have made a very bad bargain, of course, but I dare say we can manage to raise all he will cost us. Naturally, I feel inclined to do something for the old man, but that confounded Fletcher exasperates me. His shadow has been over you ever since you started in this country, and, I suppose it's foolish, but I feel that some day he'll do you a greater injury. However, at present I almost sympathize with his action. It isn't cheerful to have a future state of brimstone held up before one continually."

"When I said you had better take him, I didn't mean at your own expense," interposed the surveyor, "but that in the circumstances it would come better so. I guess we'll squeeze him somehow on to the pay-roll of the Company. Heard all about the whole thing from some one. Who? — oh, General Jackson, how should I remember? Kind of religio-political crank, isn't he? Well, I've seen some inventive geniuses among the species, and while we're driving straight ahead we can find use for a man if he's honest and handy finicking round the chores. Still, that has nothing to do with what I'm coming to. We have room for straight live men on this road, and I've been watching you two. Guess you've been losing heavy, and you stuck right down to it. Now, this branch is going to be froze up presently, and they've sent for me to finish a mining loop among the mountains of British Columbia; when some

one else has fooled a tough job they generally do. They listen at headquarters when I get up to talk, and the question is, will you bring along your outfit and haul rocks and lumber in the ranges for me? This time we'll try to make the deal a better one for you. We'll square up and pay off on what you've done so far; it will cut the loss, because there's more of the coulée, and there'll be hard frost before you're out on the prairie. Now, I've been talking straight — what have you to say?"

I looked around at the others. Harry beamed approval, Johnston nodded indifferently, and I felt a thrill of satisfaction as I turned to the railroad autocrat.

"We will come," I said simply.

"That's good," was the laconic answer. "Don't think you'll regret it," and with a nod to each of us the man who in a few moments had made a great change in our destiny was gone.

"On the up-grade now!" said Johnston, "but don't lose your heads. The great man paid you a tremendous compliment, Ralph, and that kind of thing isn't usual with him; but take it coolly. More people get badly busted, as they say in this benighted country, by sudden success than by hard luck!"

It was good to lounge in the tent door that evening, and remember that there would be no more dreary awakenings to a day of profitless labor; but perhaps it was the cool night wind and the frosty glitter of the stars that helped to check the rush of hot, hopeful fancies through my brain. I had learned already to distrust any untested offer of prosperity.

For another week nothing of moment happened, and then we spent an hour one morning with the surveyor and a gray-haired gentleman from Winnipeg. He differed from the former in many ways, and spoke with a deliberate

urbanity, but I felt that he also spoke with authority and was quietly taking stock of us. We signed several papers, a receipt among them, and it was only then that I realized what that unfortunate coulée had cost us, while, when at last we went out, the surveyor said:

"You have made a good impression, and that man's favorable opinion may mean great things to you. I shouldn't wonder if you cashed a good many big pay drafts before we have finished with you."

"I hope so," I answered grimly. "At present we are rather poorer than when we commenced the work, and whomever the new railroad benefits it has done only harm to us. That, however, is in no way your fault, and having started we're going on to see the end of it."

"Good man!" said the surveyor with a significant smile. "I shouldn't be too previous. You have six days to straighten up your business;" and after a brief conference with Harry I departed for Fairmead and Winnipeg.

Our few cattle were thriving among the herds of our neighbors, to whom we made over our stock of prairie hay. The homestead would doubtless take care of itself until we were ready to return there, as prairie homesteads often have to do; while, whether it was owing to Jasper's eloquence or to other causes, I found our remaining creditors both reasonable and willing to meet us as far as they could. So I came back with a satisfactory report, and the same evening we gathered those who worked for us about the tent, and when we had handed each a roll of dollar bills Harry laid the position before them.

"We sunk all that was left in this contract," he said, "and now when we are transferred to British Columbia we set out almost empty-handed, with the wrong kind of balance. It seems only fair I should tell you this frankly. If you decide to come with us we will, if all goes well,

pay at present rates for the services of men and teams. On the other hand, if there is any unforeseen difficulty we may have nothing to pay with, and if any one wishes to go back to his holding I should only say he's sensible. We, however, shall hold on as long as we have a dollar left."

"It's a toss-up," added Johnston. "You take your chances, and get what you can, facing the music pleasantly like the rest of us if you get nothing, which seems quite probable. Now don't jump over the edge of a ravine like the giddy antelope, but put your heads together and think about it."

There was a laugh from one of the men, who conferred apart, and another said: "We're coming along. There's no work for men or horses here in winter, and we've neither money nor credit to sow in spring. Besides, we've taken your money, you have treated us fairly, and it strikes us as mean to back down on you now. So we're open to take the chances, and all we ask is that the chances should figure either way. If you're cleaned out, we get nothing; if you win we want to come in. No; we've no use for a sliding scale to fight each other on, and I guess we'll take Contractor Lorimer's word he'll do the square thing."

"I give it," I said simply.

"We thank you;" and when they went away I felt the weight of a double responsibility.

"I congratulate you on your leadership of the hard-up company," said Johnston lightly. "This is the kind of thing that appeals to me — nothing to lose and all to win, and determined men who can do anything with axe and saw and horseflesh to back one. So it's loose guy, up peg, on saddle, and see what future waits us in the garden of the Pacific slope — in mid-winter."

It was seven days later, and many things had been done, when with our working beasts and few other possessions

lurching before us in a couple of cattle-cars, we went clattering through the Rockies at the tail of a big freight train. It was just breaking day, and Harry leaned beside me over the platform rails of a car hooked on for our accommodation, while Lee sat on the step close by wrapped in an old skin coat Harry had given him. A shrill whistle came ringing out of the stirred-up dust ahead, then the roar of wheels grew louder, rolling back repeated and magnified from the rocks above, while half-seen through the mist that rose from a river spectral pines reeled by, and an icy blast lashed my cheeks like a whip as, with throttle wide open and the long cars bouncing behind, the great mountain locomotive thundered down a declivity.

"Steve's letting her go," said the surveyor, who came out from the car. "Got to rush her through for the side-track ahead of the west-bound mail. Say, the light is growing; stay just where you are, for presently there'll be unrolled the most gorgeous panorama that ever delighted a sinful mortal's eye, and you'll see the first of what some day is going to be of all lands on this wide green earth the greatest country."

I looked up, and already the mist was rolling back like a curtain from the great slopes of rock above, sliding in smoky wreaths across the climbing pines, while as the brightness increased we could see the torrent, whose voice now almost drowned the clash of couplings and the clamor of wheels, frothing green and white-streaked among mighty boulders in the gorge below. Then as we swung giddily over a gossamer-like timber bridge, the walls of quartz and blue grit fell back on either hand; and, for the first time, I gazed in rapt silence upon the cold unsullied whiteness of eternal snow, undefiled from the beginning by any foot of man. It stretched in a glimmering saw-edge high above us athwart the brightening east, and, below, smooth-

scarped slopes of rock polished to a steely luster by endless ages of grinding ice, slid down two, or it may have been four, thousand feet, to the stately pines on the hillsides below.

There were peaks like castles, spires like the fretted stonework of Indian minarets, wrought by the hand of nature out of an awful cold purity, and mountains which resembled nothing I had ever seen or dreamed of, banded white with broken edges of green by winding glaciers; while sombered forests, every trunk in which the surveyor said exceeded two hundred feet in height, were wrapped about their knees. It was a scene of plutonic grandeur, weirdly impressive under the first of the light, with a stamp upon it of unearthly glory, and we drew in our breath when a great peak behind us glowed for a moment rosy red and then faded into saffron, just before a long shaft of radiance turned the whiteness on its shoulders into incandescence.

"What do you think of that, Lee?" Harry asked.

The old man, staring about him with a great wonder in his eyes, answered, with half-coherent solemnity: "It's the Almighty's handiwork made manifest;" and as we swept across a trestle and the trembling timber flung back the vibratory din, I caught the disjointed phrases, "The framing of the everlastin' hills; a sign an' a token while the earth shall last — an' there are many who will not see it."

"Just so," said the surveyor, smiling across at me. "Now, I'm a mechanic, and look at it in a practical way. To me it's a tremendous display of power, which is irresistible, even though it works mighty slowly. Sun, wind, and frost, all doing their share in rubbing out broad valleys and wearing down the hills, and, with the débris, the rivers are spreading new lands for wheat and fruit west into the sea. 'Wild nature run riot, chaotic desolation!' it says in the guide. No, sir; this is a great scheme, and I guess

there's neither waste nor riot. Well, that is not our business; it's our part to make a way to take out ore and produce, and bring in men — this is going to be an almighty great country. Timber for half the world, gold and silver, iron, lead, coal, and copper, rivers to give you power for nothing wherever you like to tap one with a dynamo, and a coast that's punctuated with ready-made harbors! All we want is men and railroads, and we mean to get them. I figure that if sometime our children — I'm thankful I've got none — move the greatest Empire's center West, they'll leave Montreal and Ottowa rusting, and locate it here between the Rockies and the sea. But I guess I'm talking nonsense, and there's a little in the flask — here's to the New Westminster, and blank all annexationists!"

Harry nodded as he passed the flask on to me, while Lee groaned deprecatingly, and then, brushing the gray hair back from his forehead with thin crooked fingers, said: "An' by then there'll be no more cold homes and hunger for the poor in England. It's coming, the time we've been waiting, starving, and some of us praying for so long, an' if they get their own by law, or take it tramplin' through the blood of the oppressor, they'll live and speak free Englishmen, spread out on all the good lands the Almighty intended for them."

I did not answer, though Harry said aside that he did not know the whole earth was made for Englishmen. There was occasionally much in what Lee said that commanded sympathy, but he had a habit of relapsing into vague prophetic utterance, which was perhaps acquired when he ran the Stoney Clough chapel. Still, as hour by hour we went clattering through solemn forests almost untouched by the axe, or rending apart the silence that hung over great lonely lakes, and past wide rivers, while the whole air was filled with the fragrance of pines and cedars, I won-

dered whether either his or the surveyor's forecast would come true, and decided if that were so England would have cause to be proud of this rich country. For the rest, Harry and I never found our interest slacken, and looked on in silence as that most gorgeous panorama of snow-peak, forest, and glacier unwound itself league after league before us, until at last amid a grinding of brakes the long freight train ran onto a side track. She was only just in time, for with the ballast trembling beneath, and red cinders flying from the funnel of the mammoth mountain engine ahead, the Atlantic mail went by. Then, as we stepped down on the track the same thought was evidently uppermost in each of us, for Harry said:

"Ralph, this land approaches one's wildest fancies of a terrestrial paradise, and if in spite of our efforts we fail at Fairmead it's comforting to think we can always bring up here. If I had the choice I'd like to be buried in the heart of those forests. What do you say, Johnston?"

Johnston smiled a little, but his tone was not the usual one as he answered: "I think I shall. You'll say it sounds like old woman's talk, but I fancy I'll never recross those Rockies. Anyway, it won't worry the rest of humanity very much if I don't, and I dare say we'll get some small excitement track-grading in the meantime. This country doesn't lay itself out to favor railroad building, especially in winter."

CHAPTER XIII

ADVOCATES OF TEMPERANCE

IT was a month later, and we had settled down to our new task, when Lee, who had managed to make himself generally useful, took a wholly unexpected step. Our camp stood beside the partly completed track, which after climbing through the passes wound along the edge of a precipice into a bowl-shaped hollow among the mountains. High above it on the one hand the hillsides sloped up toward the snow, which now crept lower to meet them every day. It was strewn with massy boulders and bare outcrops of rock, while the pines which managed to find a foothold here and there glittered with frost crystals every morning. Below, a wide blue lake filled half the hollow, and shingled roofs peeped out among the cedars that spread their rigid branches over its placid waters, while the roar of a frothing torrent rose hoarsely from the forest behind. Beyond this, and walled off by stupendous mountains from the outer world, lay an auriferous region, and a wooden town whose inhabitants had long struggled for an existence, hampered by the cost of bringing in stores and machinery by pack-horse train.

Railroad-building in such a land is an arduous task, needing a bold conception and a reckless execution, while no line is ever driven that is not partly paid for with the adventurous legion's blood. Our share, however, was one of the safest, for it consisted in hewing logs out of the forest for framing the spidery trestles and snow-sheds, hauling sawn lumber into position, and doing general teamster's

work. Risks there were of course — the rush of a charging boulder, or a sudden descent of shale, while occasionally a partly grubbed out trunk came thundering down before it was expected to. Comparatively few trained mechanics could be found among all the men about us, and, as usual, the hardest part of the struggle devolved upon the reckless free-lances — sailor-men deserters, unfortunate prospectors, forest ranchers whose possessions were mortgaged to the hilt, and others of the kind, who are always to the front when at the risk of life and limb a new way for civilization is hewn through the forests of the Pacific Slope.

One morning, when I rested my team a few moments, talking to Harry and the surveyor after hauling a heavy log, Johnston came up chuckling, with a strip of cedar bark on which a notice was written.

"We have an ardent reformer among our ranks, and, everything considered, I admire his pluck," he said. "You'll notice you're all invited if you listen to this — 'A temperance meeting will be held outside the Magnolia saloon tonight, when Fanny Marvin and Adam Lee will turn the flash-light upon the evils of drink and gamblin'. Every sensible man is requested to step along.'"

"I thought there was something brewing," said Harry. "Lee has lately foregathered with certain sober-faced individuals from Ontario, and they've been plotting mysteriously. Well, I suppose there will be trouble over it; but who is this Marvin?"

"She's a rising religious reformer who has taken several towns on Puget Sound by storm," said the surveyor, "and it has cost somebody considerable to bring her here. That *protégé* of yours is clearly a crank, but he's also more of a man than he looks, and, if it can be done unofficially, I'm inclined to back him. No, I'm not a teetotaler, and as a rule we're a sober people in Western Canada, but they're a

tolerably hard crowd down at Cedar, and if once the man who runs the Magnolia takes hold with his tables we'll have chaos in this camp. I'm not prejudiced, but if they must have excitement I'd sooner see the boys whooping round a temperance meeting than a gaming bank."

"Are you going, Ralph?" asked Harry. "I'm not altogether fond of the man, but in a measure we are responsible for him."

I did not answer at first as I looked down upon the roofs of Cedar Crossing. The old trail, which would be useless presently, came winding down through the passes into it, and I knew that while the average British Columbian is a sturdy law-abiding citizen, a love of excitement characterizes the miner, and after being driven out of the central town site by an energetic reform committee, a few adventurers of both sexes and indifferent morals had foregathered at Cedar Crossing, with the Magnolia saloon as headquarters.

Then I said, "Yes, I'm going"; and, as he departed, the surveyor observed dryly:

"I'd take along a few picked men with axes. They might come in handy."

Bright starlight shone coldly on the dim white peaks when Harry and I stumbled among the boulders by Cedar Lake, in whose clear depths it lay reflected with a silvery glitter. But it was warm down in the valley, and the drowsy breath of cedars filled the air, until a reek of kerosene replaced it, and presently a ruddy glare broke out among the giant trunks. When we halted under the blinking torches and two petroleum cressets outside the Magnolia, it seemed as if all the staff of the railroad had gathered there.

"They're both here," said Harry, and I saw Lee standing beside a slender figure in unbecoming dress among a group of men in blue shirts and quaintly mended jackets;

also that some planks had been laid across two barrels close by.

"Don't crowd upon the lady!" said a voice. "Order! the circus is going to begin; we're only waiting for the chairman. What's that? Ain't got no such luxuries; well, he can take the barrel."

After this, to our astonishment, Johnston, neatly attired, stood aloft upon an overturned barrel.

"I'm glad to see so many of you, boys," he said. "Now I'm not a teetotaler myself, and this is the first time I've occupied such a platform; but we're all open to conviction, and I want you to remember we've a lady here who has traveled three hundred miles to talk to you. All we ask is that you will give her and the old man a fair show."

He had struck the right note, for the British Columbian is a somewhat chivalrous person, and there was silence, through which the jingle of a piano in the saloon broke irritatingly, until Lee stood up.

"I'm a sinful man like the rest of you," he began in the more formal English and high-pitched inflection I knew so well, though the effect was diminished because some one broke in with assumed wonder, "You don't say?"

"I've the same passions in me," continued the orator, unheeding, "and once I came near murder, while for six long years I was a sodden slave to this awful drink."

"Only awful when it's bad!" another voice said; and there was a cry, "He's getting ahead nicely! 'Rah for the next President! Give him a show!"

"Sodden mind and body!" repeated Lee; "a-groveling on hands and knees in the pit of iniquity, and when I came out it left me what you see — a broken man who, if he'd saved his soul, was too late to save his body. That's what you'll remember — no one can wallow without paying for it, and you're strong men who were meant for better. It's

all in the choice you make — health, happiness, prosperity — a jump down a precipice into eternity, or dying half-rotten in a Vancouver hospital."

"The old thing, but he's taking hold," said Harry when the speaker paused a moment, and then a glow of light beat out while a tall figure stood in the doorway of the saloon. The man's face was scornful beneath the costly wide-brimmed hat; he wore a spotless white shirt instead of a blue one, while — and this was an unusual sight — a heavy revolver was strapped about his waist, and neatly polished boots reached to his knees. This I knew was Hemlock Jim, of evil repute, who had set up a gaming table, and was supposed to have purchased an interest in the Magnolia.

"Won't you come in, boys, instead of fooling 'round outside there in the cold?" he asked derisively. "You can have as much water as you like, and we won't charge you nothin' for the room."

I wondered what Johnston, who conferred with his companions, would do.

"I think we will," said the chairman. "Much obliged to you. File in quietly, boys, and those who can't find room will sit on the veranda."

Harry chuckled. "This is distinctly a new line for our partner," he commented, "and the whole trio have pluck enough. I fancy if the other side try any tricks they'll find their match in Johnston."

Then, amid banter and laughter, the big bronzed men filed up the long bare room, after which all eyes were turned toward the three who sat on a little platform beside a piano. Facing them another group, who I fancied meant mischief, lounged against the bar, looking on sardonically. Then the proprietor, who wore a large diamond in his white shirt-front, came out.

"This yere discussin' temperance is thirsty work," he said,

"and it might improve the general harmony if before you begin in earnest you had a drink with me. Ask them what they're shouting for, Jim; and, Jess, for once you'll rustle round with the tray."

There was a jingle of glasses, and a damsel with very pink cheeks and lemon-colored hair, who apparently presided over the piano, went round with a tray. It was emptied several times, and I began to foresee that the temperance demonstration would fail miserably, as it might have done but for Johnston's ready wit and the opposite party's imprudence. Grinning derisively, Hemlock Jim led the waitress straight up to the orators' platform, and, with the revolver showing significantly as he bent forward, he held out the tray saying:

"It will help the good feelin' if you have a drink with me."

This was a false step. A big man from the bush of Ontario, whose forebears had probably been Scottish Covenanters, stretched his long limbs out in front of Hemlock, while Johnston smiled as he answered:

"Not at present. Unfortunately I'm a little particular as to whom I drink with. Boys, don't you think it would be fairer if you heard our guests first, and then paid for your own refreshment afterward if they didn't convince you?"

Hemlock Jim deliberately set down his tray, the Ontario bushman seemed gathering himself together for some purpose, and there was an ominous glitter in Johnston's eyes, while just as I expected the fray to begin, the proprietor called out laughingly:

"Sit right down, Jim. Pass on them glasses, Jess. I guess they won't refuse you."

It was diplomatic, but Johnston's hint of fairness went further, and in spite of the frail beauty's smiles, a number

of those who listened waved the tray aside with the words "I pass!"

Then, when some one called out to ask what was the matter with the circus, and whether the clown were lost, while others demanded "The lady!" Johnston turned to Miss Marvin, and there was a hush as the slight girlish figure — and she seemed very young — stood upright before us. She thrust back the unlovely bonnet, and her thin face was flushed; but when, clenching nervous fingers upon the dowdy gown, she raised a high clear voice, every man in the assembly settled himself to listen. Perhaps it was a chivalrous respect for her womanhood, or mere admiration for personal courage, and she had most gallantly taken up the challenge; but I think she also spoke with force and sincerity, for my own pulse quickened in time to the rapid utterance. Then changing from the somewhat conventional tirade, she leaned forward speaking very gently, and one could hear the men breathe in the stillness, while, as far as I can remember, the plain words ran:

"It's not only for you I'm pleading; there are the women, too — the sweethearts, wives and daughters waiting at home for you. Just where and how are they waiting? Shall I tell you? 'Way back up yonder tending the cattle in the lonely ranch, where the timber wolves howl along ranges on the moonlight nights; and I guess you know it's lonely up there in the bush. Then I can see others sewing with heavy eyes and backs that are aching in a Vancouver shack. You had no money to leave them, and they had to do the best they could. Have they no use for the money you would spend in liquor here — the women who never cried out when they let you go? Don't heart-break and black, black solitude count anything with you? You're building railroads, building up a great Dominion, but the waiting women are doing their part, too. And I'm thinking

of others still, gilt-edged and dainty, 'way in the old country. I've seen a few. Where's the man from an English college that used to feel himself better after they talked to him? Is he here with the fire of bad whisky in him, betting against the banker to win a smile from Jess of Caribou?"

This woman knew how to stir them, and there was an expressive murmur, while some fidgeted. Then the proprietor beckoned across the room, and Hemlock Jim spoke:

"This is only high-tone sentiment. Most of us aren't married, and don't intend to. No, sir, we've no use for a missis rustling round with a long-handled broom on the track of us, and I'm going to move an amendment."

"You can't do it," said Johnston. "You brought us in of your own will, and now you've got to hear us. This meeting is going on quietly to its conclusion if I hold the chair. Sit down, sir."

"I'll be shot if I do!" said the other, and it became evident that trouble was near, for a group of the disaffected commenced to sidle toward the platform, calling on Caribou Jessy to give them a song.

But Johnston was equal to the occasion. "If you're wanting music we've brought our own orchestra along. Mr. Harry Lorraine, the tenor, will oblige you."

Harry promptly entered into the spirit of the thing, for he sat down good-humoredly, and, though I forget what he sang, it was a ballad with a catching refrain, which he rendered well, and hardly had the applause died away when the girl commenced again, while Lee, who followed, made a strong impression this time. Then, before the interest had slackened, Miss Marvin held up a little book, smiling sweetly as she said:

"It was kind of you to listen so patiently, and now I'm asking a last favor. Won't you all walk along and write your names down here?"

A number of the listeners did so, and when the rest refused jestingly, Johnston got up.

"The meeting is over," he said, "but there's one thing yet to do — to pass a vote of thanks to the proprietor for the use of his saloon. Then I should like to ask him to lay out his best cigars on the bar for every one to help himself."

There was acclamation, and the assembly would have dispersed peaceably but that just as we went out Hemlock Jim, who had gathered the disaffected round him, said to Johnston:

"I'm glad to see the last of you. Now sail out into perdition, and take your shameless woman with you. But — I'm not particular — she's got to pay tribute first."

He grasped the trembling girl's shoulder, dragged back the ample bonnet, but the next moment I had him by the throat, and he went reeling sideways among his comrades. Then, as by a signal the tumult began, for with a crash of splintered glass the nearest lamp went out, and a rush was made upon us. Something struck me heavily on the head; I saw Johnston stagger under a heavy blow; but I held myself before the girl as we were hustled through the doorway, and when a pistol-barrel glinted one of the railroad men whirled aloft an axe. We were outside now, but the pistol blazed before the blade came down, and a man beside me caught at a veranda pillar with a cry just as the door banged to.

"It's Pete of the shovel gang!" somebody said. "It was Hemlock Jim who shot him. Where's the man with the axe to chop one of these pillars for a battering-ram? Roll round here, railroad builders!"

A roar of angry voices broke out, and it was evident that popular sympathy was on the reformers' side, while my blood was up. Pete of the shovel gang, a quiet, inoffensive man,

sat limply on the veranda, with the blood trickling from his shoulder, and there was the insult to the girl to be avenged; while, if more were needed, somebody hurled opprobrious epithets at us from an upper window. I wrenched the axe from its owner — and he resisted stubbornly — whirled it round my shoulder, and there was another roar when after a shower of splinters the stout post yielded. It was torn loose from the rafters, swung backward by sinewy arms, and driven crashing against the saloon door, one panel of which went in before it. Twice again, while another pistol-shot rang out, we plied the ram, and then followed it pell-mell across the threshold, where we went down in a heap amid the wreckage of the door, though I had sense enough left to remove Hemlock's smoking revolver which lay close by, just where he had dropped it on the floor. He evidently had not expected this kind of attack and suffered for his ignorance. We could not see him, but a breathless voice implored somebody to "Give them blame deadbeats socks!" and there was evidently need for prompt action, because the rest of our opponents had entrenched themselves behind the bar, which was freely strengthened by chairs and tables; also, as we picked ourselves up, an invisible man behind the barricade called out in warning:

"Stop right there. Two of us have guns!"

"Will you come out, and give up Hemlock Jim?" asked Johnston, while half a dozen men who had found strangely assorted weapons gathered alert and eager behind him, a little in advance of the rest, and Lee panted among them with the blood running down his face.

"If you want him you've got to lick us first!" was the answer. "We don't back down on a partner. But I guess he's hardly worth the trouble, for he's looking very sick — your blank battering-ram took him in the stummick."

"One minute in which to change your mind!" said Johns-

ton, holding up his watch. "Bring along that log, boys, and get her on the swing;" and tightening my grip on the axe I watched the heavy beam oscillate as our partner called off the last few seconds.

"Fifty-four! fifty-five! fifty-six!—"

But he got no further. Swinging sideways from the waist, he was only just in time, for once more a pistol flashed among the chairs; and when another man loosed his hold Johnston roared, "Let her go!"

The head of the beam went forward; we followed it with a yell. There was a crash of splintered red-wood, and my axe clove a chair. Then shouting men were scrambling over the remnants of the bar, while just what happened during the next few moments I do not remember, except that there was a great destruction of property, and presently I halted breathless, while the leader of the vanquished, who were hemmed in a corner, raised his hand.

"We're corralled, and give up," he said. "Here's Hemlock Jim — not much good to any one by the look of him. What are you going to do with us?"

"Are those men badly hurt?" asked Johnston.

"Not much," some one answered. "Pete's drilled clean through the upper arm; it missed the artery, and the ball just ripped my leg."

"Well, we'll settle about Jim afterward; it's surgical assistance he wants first. As to the rest of you, he led you into this, and we'll let you go on two conditions — you subscribe a dollar each to Miss Marvin's society and sign the pledge."

There was a burst of laughter, in which even some of the vanquished joined sheepishly; but as they filed past between a guard armed with shovels and empty bottles Johnston saw that they filled their names into the book, and duly handed each his ticket, while I regret to say that Harry's

selection was daringly appropriate, as with full musical honors he played them out.

"There's a hat at the door!" said Johnston, "you can put your dollars in. You have spent an exciting evening, and must pay for your fun." And presently that hat overflowed with money, while Lee, with his Ontario stalwarts, did huge execution with a shovel among such bottles as remained unwrecked behind the bar. We placed Hemlock Jim on a stretcher, groaning distressfully, while our two wounded declared themselves fit to walk, and before we marched off in triumph to the camp Johnston raised his hat as he placed a heavy package of silver in Miss Marvin's hand.

"I've no doubt your organization can make a good use of this," he said. "It's also a tribute to your own bravery. I'll leave you half a dozen men who'll camp in the road opposite your lodgings, and see you safely back to the main line to-morrow. They're most sober Calvinists, with convictions of the Cromwellian kind, and I don't think any of our late disturbers will care to interfere with them."

When we approached the tents, chanting weird songs of victory, the surveyor met us, and in answer to his questions Johnston laughed.

"The temperance meeting was an unqualified success," he said. "We've broken up all the bottles in the Magnolia saloon — Lee reveled among them with a hammer. Then we made all the malcontents we could catch sign the pledge, and you'll find the chief dissenter behind there on the stretcher."

"Glad to hear it," remarked the surveyor, dryly. "Judging by your appearance the proceedings must have been of the nature of an Irish fair."

I remember that when we discussed the affair later Johnston said, "What did I do it for? Well, perhaps from a sense of fairness, or because that girl's courage got hold of

me. Don't set up as a reformer — that's not me; but I've a weakness for downright if blundering sincerity, and I fancied I could indirectly help them a little."

The next morning we were astonished to find that Hemlock Jim had gone. "Thought he was dyin' last night!" said the watcher, "and as that didn't matter I went to sleep; woke up, and there wasn't a trace of him." This was evidently true, and where he went to remained a mystery, for we heard no more of Hemlock Jim, though there was a marked improvement in the morals of Cedar Crossing, while, and this we hardly expected, some of those who signed that pledge honestly kept it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HIRED TEAMSTER

SPEAKING generally, winter is much less severe in British Columbia, especially near the coast, than it is on the prairie, though it is sufficiently trying high up among the mountains, where as a rule little work is done at that season. Still, though the number of the track-layers was largely reduced, the inhabitants of the mining region had waited long enough, and so, in spite of many hardships, slowly, fathom by fathom, we carried the rail-head on.

Now and then for several days together we sat in our log-built shelter while a blinding snowstorm raged outside and the pines filled the valley with their roaring. Then there were weeks of bitter frost, when work was partly suspended, and both rock and soil defied our efforts. One of our best horses died and another fell over a precipice. Hay was hardly to be bought with money, provisions only at an exorbitant cost, and though we received a few interim payments it was, as Johnston said, even chances either way if we kept on top, because every day of enforced idleness cost us many dollars. However, floundering through snow-slush, swinging the axe in driving sleet and rain, or hauling the massy logs through the mire of a sudden thaw, we persisted in our task, though often at nights we sat inside the shanty, which was filled with steaming garments, counting the cost, in a state of gloomy despondency. Except for the thought of Grace, there were moments when I might have yielded; but we were always an obstinate race, and seeing

that I was steadfastly determined to hold out to the last, the others gallantly aided me. Now, when the time of stress is past, I know how much I owe to their loyalty.

At length, however, the winter drew to an end, and the whole mountain region rejoiced at the coming of the spring. A warm wind from the Pacific set the cedars rustling, the sun shone bright and hot, and the open fringe of the forest was garlanded with flowers, while a torrent made wild music in every ravine. I was sitting outside our shanty one morning smoking a pet English briar, whose stem was bitten half-way, and reveling in the warmth and brightness, when the unexpected happened. By degrees, perhaps under the spell of some influence which stirs us when sleeping nature awakens once more to life, I lost myself in reverie, and recalled drowsily a certain deep, oak-shrouded hollow under the Lancashire hills, where at that season pale yellow stars of primroses peeped out among the fresh green of tender leaves. Then the bald heights of Starcross Moor rose up before me, and Grace came lightly across the heather chanting a song, with her hat flung back, and the west wind kissing her face into delicate color, until a tramp of footsteps drew nearer down the track.

A man, who evidently was neither a bush-rancher nor a railroad hand, approached and said with a pure English accent:

"I'm in a difficulty, and it was suggested that Contractor Lorimer might help me. I presume I have the pleasure of addressing him? My name is Calvert."

"I will if I can," I answered, and the stranger continued:

"It's my duty to escort two ladies from the main line into the Lonsdale valley. They have a quantity of baggage, and I have no confidence in the half-starved Cayuse ponies the Indians offered me. The trails are hardly safe just now, and the regular freighters hadn't a beast to spare. It would

be a favor if you came with yours, and we should, of course, be glad to recoup you for the time you lose."

His manner was pleasant, money was very scarce then, and as it happened we had been compelled to lay off for a day or two, awaiting material; so I arranged to start with him.

"A little change will be good for you," Harry said, when the man departed. "You have been looking as grim as a hungry bear lately. Jim Lawrence, I dare say, would lend you his sisters' saddles."

The outward journey, made partly under cover of darkness, was arduous, for each torrent came roaring down swollen by melting snow almost bank-full, and portions of the trail had been washed away; but we reached the station settlement in safety, and after a few hours' sleep there we turned out to meet the west-bound train. It came thundering down the valley presently with the sunlight flashing upon burnished metal and the long car windows, and when amid a roar of blown-off steam it rolled into the station, I wondered with mild curiosity what kind of women the new arrivals would be. The next moment my pulse quickened as a gray-haired lady stepped down from the platform of a car, for when my companion hurried forward with uplifted hat I saw that it was Miss Carrington, while fresh and dainty, as though she had not traveled at all, Grace followed her.

Then I remembered that my place was that of hired teamster, and I stood waiting outside the baggage-car until Calvert gave me the brass checks, after which I assisted the man who came with me to cinch a surprisingly heavy load on our two pack-horses. The battered felt hat probably concealed my face, all I had on was homely and considerably the worse for wear, and it was scarcely surprising that they did not recognize me. Presently, leading Jasper's bay

horse forward, I stooped and held out my hand for Grace to rest her little foot on, and when she swung herself lightly into the saddle, Calvert said:

"The sooner we start the better, the trails are positively awful. Contractor Lorimer, you will no doubt take especial care of Miss Carrington."

Swinging low the broad hat, I looked up and saw a faint tinge of crimson mantle in the face of the girl, while again a thrill went through me when she said simply, "Ralph!" for that name had never passed her lips before in my hearing.

Then, while Calvert looked hard at me and the elder lady bowed, she patted the bay horse's neck, saying frankly:

"It's an unexpected pleasure, and I have often been thinking about you, but never expected to meet you here. What a handsome beast you have brought me!"

Grace seldom showed all her feelings, for a sweet serenity characterized her, but this time I fancied that our relative positions both puzzled and troubled her, and I regretted my own stupidity in not asking who the ladies were. Still, I managed to answer that Cæsar should be proud of his burden.

That was a memorable journey in various ways. In places, beaten by the hoofs of many pack-horses, the trail was knee-deep in mire, and in others it was lost under beds of treacherous shale. But Cæsar was used to the mountains, and I strode beside his head, heeding neither slippery shingle nor plastic mud, for Grace chatted about her English visit, and with such a companion I should have floundered contentedly over leagues of ice and snow.

The valleys were filled with freshness, and the air was balmy with scents, while every bird and beast rejoiced with the vigor of the spring. Now and then a blue grouse broke out drumming from the summit of a stately fir, white-headed

eagles and fish-hawks wheeled screaming above the frothing shallows on slanted wing, and silently, like flitting shadows, the little wood-deer leaped across the trail, or amid a crash of undergrowth a startled black bear charged in blind panic through the dim recesses of the bush. Once, too, with a snarl, a panther sprang out from a thicket, and Calvert's rifle flashed; but the only result was that Cæsar tried to rear upright. With fear I clutched at his rein, and it was a pretty sight to see the big, rough-coated horse settle down as if ashamed of his fright when the fair rider spoke soothingly to him. All dumb creatures took kindly to Grace, and, though Cæsar could show a very pretty temper in ungentle hands, he yielded to the caressing touch of her soft fingers. Then he turned his eyes upon me with a look that seemed an apology for dividing his allegiance, while Grace smiled under lowered lashes, as though she did not wish to meet my gaze. It was a trifling incident, but inwardly I thanked the good horse for it. Later, when we came up out of a roaring ford, through which I carefully led Cæsar, with the stream boiling about my waist, into a dim avenue, she looked down at me as she said:

"This is a dream-like country, and I never imagined anything so beautiful. And yet it is familiar. Do you remember what you once said to me at Lone Hollow?"

The question was wholly unnecessary, for I could remember each moment of that night, and any one in touch with nature could understand her comment. It was a great forest temple through which we were marching, where the giant conifers were solemn with the antiquity of long ages, for it had taken probably a thousand years to raise the vaulted roof above us, with its groined arches of red branches and its mighty pillars of living wood. Nature does all things slowly, but her handiwork is very good.

"Yes," Grace continued, "it seems familiar — as though

you and I had ridden together through such a country once before; I even seem to know those great redwoods well. I — I think I dreamed it, but there is another intangible memory in which you figured too."

"I could not be in better company," I answered, smiling, though my heart beat. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded with a sleep, you know; and here among the mountains it seems borne in on one forcibly that, as I told you my partner said, man's intellect is feeble and we do not know everything."

Grace sighed, and then, though she answered lightly, there was the same puzzled look on her face that I had seen for a moment at Cypress Hollow. It seemed as if her mind reached forward toward something that eluded its grasp, until we both broke into laughter as a willow-grouse disturbed by the horse's feet rose whirring to a redwood branch and perched there, close within reach, regarding us with an assurance that was ludicrous.

"It thinks it is perfectly safe," I said. "You might shoot until you hit it, or knock it down with a stick, and yet there is no more timorous creature among the undergrowth, unless it has a brood of chicks, when it will attack any one."

At noon we rested for luncheon in an open glade, where bright sunlight beat down upon the boulders of a stream which surged among them, stained green by the drainage from a glacier; and there was merry laughter over the viands Calvert produced from his pack.

"I did my best, Miss Carrington," he said, "but as yet they're a primitive people among these mountains — and it's not to be wondered at, with that huge rampart between them and civilization. 'Something nice for a lady?' the storekeeper said. 'Guess I've just got it.' And he planked down a salmon-fed reistit ham and this bottle of ancient candy, with the dead flies thrown in. Still, one can't help

admiring them for the way they've held on, growing stuff they cannot sell, building stores where few men come to buy, and piling up low-grade ore that won't pay its pack-freight to the smelter. Also I've seen work that three men spent a year over which a hydraulic monitor would have done in a few days, while the rocks seem bursting with riches and the valleys with fertility; but they can get neither produce out nor mining plant in. Their greatest hero now is a certain enterprising director, and they'd decline an angel's visit at any time for that of a railroad builder."

"I sometimes wish I had been born a man, with work of that kind to do," said Grace, with a fire in her eyes. "We hear of the old romance and lost chivalry, but there was never more than in these modern days, only it has changed its guise. If we haven't the knight in armor or the roystering swashbuckler, we have the man with the axe and drill; and is it not a task for heroes to drive the level steel road through these tremendous mountains? You are smiling, Mr. Calvert. I read the papers — Colonial and British, all I can come across — and I know that some day England will need all her colonies. You cannot deny that this is a sensible question: Which is the better for an English gentleman, to use all the strength and valor that is entrusted him — we are taught there will be a reckoning when he must account for them — subduing savage Nature, that the hungry may eat cheaper bread, or lounging about a race-course, shooting driven pheasants — I know it needs high skill — or wasting precious hours in the reeking smoke-room of his club? If I had a brother I should sooner see him working as a C. P. R. track-shoveler."

"Grace has strong opinions," said the old lady. "I think she is right, in a measure."

Calvert bowed. "It's in the Carrington blood. Miss Grace, I once heard one of your father's old comrades say

that the Colonel could keep no officers because he wore them out, and he might have ended as General but that he reversed the positions and wanted to instruct the War Office. However, you mustn't be too hard on the poor loungers; they eat the things the other fellows grow, and some of them subscribe the money to make the new railroads go — they don't always get dividends on it either. Besides," — and there was a twinkle in his eyes — "you are making my new friend uncomfortable. He is a railroad builder. Are you working for philanthropic notions, Mr. Lorimer?"

"No," I answered soberly; and the rest of the party laughed as I added: "Only to pay back what I owe; and we are making slow progress in that direction. Still, the work has its fascination, and it will last and be useful after we are gone."

Then, while Calvert spoke to Miss Carrington, Grace turned toward me with a sudden look of interest.

"You are not exactly prospering, I gather," she said, "and I am very sorry. Please commence when you left Fairmead and tell me all the story."

I did so — perhaps not very clearly, for she asked many questions during the course of the narrative; and her eyes sparkled at the story of our profitless struggle in the coulée.

"Flour — poor thirds; whose brand? — local pork — and doubtless the cheapest tea, you lived on. I manage the affairs of the Manor, and may I ask what your grocery list came to? How much maize and oats for the horses? Thank you. It was just as one might have expected. No, I have never been disappointed in either Harry Lorraine or you."

She dragged the particulars from me — and no one, much less Ralph Lorimer, could refuse to answer Grace Carrington — with a skill that came from practical knowl-

edge of such details, before I even guessed what she wished to arrive at. Then she laughed at my confusion.

"You have no need to blush. Starved yourselves and fed the cattle. It was well done. And didn't the new partner grumble?"

"No," I answered, glad to change the subject. "Johnston never grumbled at anything in his life, I think. It was he who managed the commissariat."

"Do you realize, Mr. Lorimer, that you are in many ways a lucky man?" she added. "I understand perfectly what it means to lose a crop and carry out an unprofitable contract. But it is in reference to your comrades I speak. Fearless, loyal partners are considerably better than the best of gear with half-hearted help, and it is evident that you have them."

"Yes," I said. "No man ever had better; and it is quite true what you say. With a loyal partner a man may do very much, and, if he is sure of himself, with a higher mind to show him the way, he might reach out toward the heavens and —"

Here I stopped abruptly. Wild thoughts were crystallizing into words I might not speak, and I grew hot with the struggle to check them, while I fancied that Grace blushed before she turned her face away. I know my brow was furrowed and my fingers trembled, so that it was a relief presently to hear her musical laugh.

"You are not an orator," she said, turning around calmly; "and perhaps it is as well. It is not orators who are wanted in this country. Your eloquent beginning too suddenly breaks away. But don't you think we are in the meantime drifting into idle sentiment? And you have asked me neither where I am going nor about Colonel Carrington."

It was true; the first would have seemed presumptuous

and I did not care greatly about the redoubtable Colonel's health.

"He has invested some money in a new mine in the Lonsdale district," she said; and there was a slight cloud on her brow as she continued: "The Manor farm has lately cost us, through bad seasons, more than we made from it. So, while Foster takes charge, we are going to live in a ranch up here this summer, in order that my father may assist in the development of the mine. He is practically the leading partner, and until your railroad is finished there will be serious transportation difficulties. I hope you will come to see us often."

"Time is up!" said Calvert.

I helped Grace into the saddle, and the rest of the perfect afternoon passed like a happy dream. Even if alone, at that season the mere sounds and scents of reawakening Nature would have elated me; but then I strode on, holding Cæsar's rein, lost in the golden glamour of it all, until snow peak and solemn forest seemed but a fitting background for the slender figure swaying to the horse's stride, while the pale, calm face brought into the shadowy aisles a charm of its own. Once — and I could not help myself — a few lines written by a master who loved Nature broke from me, and for a moment Grace seemed startled. It was a passage from the first home-coming of Queen Guinevere.

"Shall we thank Providence for a good conceit of ourselves?" she said lightly, a little later. "You are hardly a Lancelot, Sir Railroad Builder; and she — is it a compliment to compare me with Arthur's faithless Queen?"

Thereupon I lapsed into silence, feeling like one who has blundered on the edge of a precipice; and Grace was silent too, for the day drew toward its close, and a red glare of sunset came, slanting in among the massy trunks, striking strange glints of color from her hair, while winsome and

graceful to the tiny foot in the stirrup, her lissom shape was outlined against it. Then for a while we left the woods, and rode down the hillside under the last of the afterglow, which blazed, orange, green and crimson, along the heights of eternal snow, calling up ruby flashes from the ragged edge of a glacier, while Grace seemed lost in wonder and awe. I do not think there are any sunsets in the world like those of British Columbia.

"It is unearthly — majestic!" she said half to herself. "And once I almost felt inclined to sympathize with a Transatlantic scribbler, who compared the Revelation to what he termed a wholesale jewelry show. He was a townsman who had never crossed the Rockies — and if there are glories like this on earth, what must the everlasting city be?"

The weird fires paled and faded, and the peaks were coldly solemn under their crown of snow, while a little breeze awoke strange harmonies among the cedars, and there was no more talking. Perhaps we were physically tired, though that day's march was a very slight task for me, but I felt that after what we had seen silence became me best. It was dark long before we rode into Cedar Crossing, and Grace was worn-out when I helped her from the saddle. Miss Carrington apparently found some difficulty in straightening herself, and when Calvert had installed them in the one second-rate hotel, after a visit to an acquaintance there, I sat smoking beneath a hemlock most of the night keeping guard over it. This was, of course, palpably absurd; but I was young, and from early ages many others have done much the same, while, though it seems the fashion to despise all sentiment now, it is probable that future generations will show traces of equal foolishness.

We finished the journey on the third day, but I did not see Colonel Carrington. He was busy at the mine, and it was not worth while wasting precious time in the really

comfortable ranch he had hired, awaiting his return for the mere pleasure of exchanging greetings with him, while Grace was far too tired to entertain anybody.

Calvert looked awkward when he shook hands with me. "I don't quite know how to put it," he said, "but you will understand we can't take you away several days from your work gratuitously, and all transport is charged to the Syndicate. Being a trained engineer, I'm working manager, and, as a matter of business, what do I owe you?"

"Nothing!" I answered shortly. "I could take no payment for assisting Miss Carrington. If you like, you can send five dollars to the Vancouver hospital."

"I trust we'll be friends" said Calvert. "Hope I didn't offend you. Meant it in the best of faith. I'm coming round to see you, and whenever you have leisure you must look upon my quarters yonder as your own."

I rode back wondering whether the work had suffered during my absence, though I knew my partners would not complain, and when I reached camp Harry said:

"I hardly thought we'd set up as packers, but in the meantime all is fish that comes to our net. I'm getting quite a mercenary character. You had a long journey — how much did you get?"

"Nothing," I answered, "except a gift of five dollars for the Vancouver hospital. It was Miss Carrington."

Harry made no articulate comment at first, though his whistle, which from any one else would have been impertinence, was eloquent, while some moments elapsed before he spoke.

"Then it's Colonel Carrington who is running the Day Spring mine. I've heard the free prospectors talking about the new Syndicate. They opine there's nothing in it, and that somebody is going to be hard hit."

CHAPTER XV

UNDER THE SHADOW OF DEATH

IN spite of the many new hands who flocked in with the spring, the line progressed slowly. This was quite comprehensible, and when I traveled over it afterward as a passenger I wondered how we had ever built it at all. Portions were hewn out of the solid rock, of a hardness that was often too much for our most carefully tempered drills; others were underpinned with timber against the mountain side, or carried across deep ravines on open trestles; while much of it had to be roofed in by massive sheds, so that the snow-slides might not hurl it into the valley.

On several occasions we were almost checkmated in our efforts to supply and clear a way for the builders. There was, of course, no lack of timber, but the difficulty was to get it out of the forest and into position, for we often spent days building skidways or hewing roads to bring the great logs down, after which it cost us even a longer time rigging gear to lower them over dangerous ledges to those who worked below. Still, we made progress, and the free miners or forest ranchers who trudged behind their weary pack-horses down the trail that crossed the track encouraged us in their own fashion, which was at times slightly eccentric; while now and then a party of citizens from the struggling town rode over to inspect the new road they hoped would do so much for them.

Sometimes they brought small presents with them, and I remember one who watched our efforts admiringly said:

"You must be clearing your little pile by the way you're rustling," and looked blankly incredulous when I answered: "No; we're only trying to pay back other men their own."

Nevertheless, on occasions when the work was suspended temporarily, I made a two days' journey to Colonel Carrington's ranch, and spent a few blissful hours there beneath the cedars with his sister and Grace. Both seemed pleased to see me, and I managed to console myself for the absence of the Colonel and Ormond. They returned at sunset, when I took my departure, and even Ormond was usually disreputable of aspect. Many difficulties were connected with the development of the Day Spring mine, and when there was need for it Ormond showed himself a capable man of action. Night and day the freighters met him riding along the heavy trails, hurrying in tools and supplies, and the shaft-sinkers said that he was always foremost when there was risky work to be done. Once also, when I sat smoking in Calvert's shanty, the latter, who was freely smeared with the green mountain clay, said:

"We are none of us exactly idlers, but Geoffrey Ormond is tireless. In fact, I hardly recognize him as the same man, and it is just as well. We have sunk a good deal in this undertaking, and it will go hard with some of the Syndicate if we don't get out rich quartz. Ormond in particular invested, I think, almost recklessly. He's a distant connection of our leader's, you know, and it's probable he's hoping for Miss Carrington's hand. There's no doubt that the irascible Colonel would be glad to have him for a son-in-law, and he is really a very good fellow, but I'm not sure that Miss Carrington likes him — in that way."

Here Calvert flicked the ash off his cigar, and looked at me before he continued: "It's not my business, and perhaps I'm gossiping, but Colonel Carrington is not addicted to changing his mind, and I anticipate a dramatic climax some

day. In any case, she will never with his consent marry a poor man. You can take my word for it — I'm speaking feelingly."

When, after exchanging a few words of cold politeness with the Colonel, I rode homeward the next morning I wondered whether Calvert, who certainly was not given to gossiping, had intended this as a friendly warning. Every one in their own manner seemed bent on warning me, and yet, as long as Grace remained Miss Carrington, I could not give up hope, and it was that very hope that added force to every stroke of the glinting axe or another hour of toil to the weary day. And so, while spring melted into summer, I worked and waited until fate intervened.

Now between the mining town and Cedar the river loses itself in a gloomy cañon, one of those awful gorges which are common among the mountains of British Columbia. Two great rocks partly close the entrance, and beyond this the chasm is veiled in spray, while its roar when the floods race through it can be heard several miles away. Scarcely a ray of sunlight enters its shadowy depths, and looking up from beside the entrance one can see the great pines that crown the sheer fall of rock looming against the skyline in a slender lace-like filigree. Sometimes, when frost bound fast the feeding snows, the Siwash Indians ran their light canoes through, but I never heard of a white man attempting the passage, and one glance was sufficient to show the reason. I understood it better when as by a miracle I came alive out of the cañon.

It was a still evening, and again the afterglow flamed behind the western pines, when, holding Cæsar's rein, I stood under a hemlock talking to Grace Carrington. We had been compelled to wait for more ironwork, and I made the long journey on the specious excuse of visiting a certain blacksmith who was skilled in sharpening tools. Calvert's

offer of hospitality was now proving an inestimable boon. Harry pointed out that we had a man in camp who could do the work equally well, but I found a temporary deafness convenient then.

"It was very kind of you to suggest it, and if you could get the things in by your supply train we should be very glad," she said. "I really do not know whom to write to, and the pack-horse freighters often wet or spoil them. Aunt and I intend to spend a few days at the Lawrences' ranch, and you could meet us with the package at the cañon crossing on Thursday morning."

I glanced at the list she handed me, and wondered what Harry, who had to visit Vancouver, would say when he found I had pledged him to ransack the dry-goods stores for all kinds of fabrics. Still, I felt I should have faced much more than my comrades' remonstrances to please Grace Carrington then, as she stood beside me, glorified as it were by the garish sunset.

"My aunt will be especially grateful," she added. "And now, good-bye. She will never forgive you if you damage her new dress."

She spoke with a half-mocking and wholly bewitching air, for when Grace unbent she did it charmingly, holding out a shapely hand, while the light sparkled among the glossy clusters above her forehead. Grace's hair might have been intended for a net in which to catch stray sunshine. Then while I prepared to take up the challenge the slender fingers tightened on my own.

"What was that?" she asked with a start, for a wild shrill cry rang suddenly out of the stillness, and the hillside returned the sound in a doleful wailing before it died away.

"Only a loon, a water-bird!" I said, though the cry had also startled me.

Grace shivered as she answered: "I have never heard it

before, and it sounded so unearthly — almost like a warning of some evil. But it is growing late, and you have far to go. I shall expect you at the crossing."

She turned back toward the house, and I laughed at my momentary confusion as I rode on through the deepening shadow, for though it is strangely mournful the loon's shrill call was nothing unusual in that land. Still, mere coincidence as it was, remembering Grace's shiver it troubled me, and I should have been more uneasy had I known how we were to keep that fateful tryst.

It was a glorious morning when, with a package strapped to the saddle, I rode down between the pine trunks to the crossing. The river flashed like burnished silver below, and the sunlight made colored haloes in the filmy spray that drifted about the black mouth of the cañon, while rising and falling in thunderous cadence the voice of many waters rang forth from its gloomy depths. The package was a heavy one, for there were many domestic sundries as well as yards of dry-goods packed within it, and Harry assured me it had taken him a whole day to procure them, adding that he was doubtful even then whether he had satisfactorily filled the bill.

I had loitered some time on the hillside until I could see the party winding down the opposite slope. Then the forest hid them, and it appeared that, perhaps because the waters were high, they were not going straight to the usual ford, but intended first to send the ladies across in a canoe which lay lower down near a slacker portion of the rapid stream. The slope on my own side was steep, but, picking my way cautiously, I was not far above the river, which boiled in a succession of white-ridged rapids, when I saw Grace seat herself in the stern of the canoe, which Ormond thrust off until it was nearly afloat. Then he returned for her aunt, while Colonel Carrington and rancher Lawrence

led the horses toward the somewhat risky ford up-stream. The river was swollen by melting snow, and it struck me that they would have some difficulty in crossing.

Then a hoarse shout rang out, "The canoe's adrift!" followed by another from the Colonel, "Get hold of the paddle, Grace! — for your life paddle!"

It had all happened in a moment. Doubtless some slight movement on the girl's part had set the light Indian craft afloat, and for another second or two I stared aghast upon a scene that is indelibly impressed on my memory. There was Ormond scrambling madly among the boulders, tearing off his jacket as he ran, Colonel Carrington struggling with a startled horse, and his sister standing rigid and still, apparently horror-stricken, against the background of somber pines. Then forest and hillside melted away, and while my blood grew chill I saw only a slender white-robed figure in the stern of the canoe, which was sliding fast toward the head of the tossing rapid that raced in a mad seething into the cañon.

Then I smote the horse, gripped the rein, and we were off at a flying gallop down the declivity. A branch lashed my forehead, sweeping my hat away; for an instant something warm dimmed my vision, and as I raised one hand to dash it away a cry that had a note of agony in it came ringing down the valley.

"Make for the eddy, Grace! For heaven's sake, paddle!"

How Cæsar kept his footing I do not know. The gravel was rattling behind us, the trunks reeled by, and the rushing water seemed flying upward toward me. Even now I do not think I had any definite plan, and it was only blind instinct that prompted me to head down-stream diagonally to cut off the approaching canoe; but I answered the Colonel's shout with an excited cry, and drove the horse headlong at a shelf of rock. I felt his hoofs slipping on

its mossy covering, there was a strident clang of iron on stone, and then with a sudden splash we were in the torrent together. Cæsar must have felt the bottom beneath him a moment or two, for I had time to free my feet from the stirrups before he was swimming gallantly; but one cannot take a horse on board a birch-bark canoe, and the light shell shot down the green and white-streaked rush toward me even as I flung myself out of the saddle. And, staring forward with drawn-back lips and eyes wide open, I could see the white face in the stern.

Thanking Providence that I could swim well, I swung my left arm forward with hollowed palm, and shot away from the beast with head half-buried under the side-stroke's impetus, making a fierce effort to gain the center of the flow in time. Something long and dark swept past me. With an inarticulate gasp of triumph I seized it, managed to fall in head foremost over the stem, which in a tender craft of that beam is a difficult thing to do, and then, snatching the second paddle, whirled it madly. I felt the stout redwood bend at every stroke, my lungs seemed bursting, and there was a mist before my eyes, but it was borne in on me that I had come too late, and that already no earthly power could snatch us from the cañon.

Hemlock and boulder, stream-hammered reef and pine, flitted by, closing in on one another along the half-seen shore. The river frothed white about us in steep boiling ridges as it raced down the incline, and nearer and nearer ahead tossed the ghostly spray cloud that veiled the mouth of the chasm. As we lurched broadside to the rapid each steeper liquid upheaval broke into the canoe; for every foot I won shoreward the stream swept us sideways two; and when, grasping the pole, I thrust against a submerged boulder with all my strength, the treacherous redwood snapped in half. Then there was a bewildering roar, a blinding

shower of spray, and we were out upon the short slide of glassy green water which divided the tail of the rapid from the mouth of the cañon. As I flung away the broken pole and groped for the paddle I saw with eyes that were clouded by blood and sweat Grace raise her hand as though in a last farewell, and then as she faced round once more our glances met. She said no word. I could not have heard if she had, for all sound was swallowed up in one great pulsating diapason; but she afterward said that she felt impelled to look at me, and knew that I would turn my head. And so for an instant, there where the barriers of caste and wealth had melted away before the presence of death, our two souls met in a bond that should never be broken.

Now there are occasions when even the weakest seem endowed with a special strength, while a look of blind confidence from the woman he loves is capable of transforming almost any man, and I knew in the exaltation of that moment, for my own sake, I had no fear of death. If I could not save her, I felt it would be a good end to go down into the green depths attempting it.

Then the canoe lurched forward half its length clear of the water, a white haze eddied about us, the sunlight went out, and we were in the cañon, shooting down the mad rush of a rapid toward eternity. I plied the paddle my hardest to keep the frail craft head on, that she might not roll over by sheering athwart the stream, not because I had any hope of escape, but that it seemed better to go under fighting. The work was severe enough, as, not having learned the back-feather under water, I must dip the blade on either side alternately, while each time that I dare turn my eyes backward a moment the sight of Grace kneeling with set white face in the stern further strengthened me. The pace grew a little easier as we drew out into a somewhat slacker

flow, and I made shift with an empty fruit-can to free the craft of water, until Grace spoke, and her words reached me brokenly through the deeper growling of the river:

"Do you think there is any chance of safety?"

"Yes," I answered stoutly, though it is probable my voice belied me. It was so strained I could hardly recognize it. "The canoe may keep afloat until we reach the other end, or perhaps we can find a bar to land on and climb up somewhere." Then I felt glad that my shoulders were turned toward her as she said:

"I am afraid it is a very small one. There is a fall and a whirlpool ahead, and no one could climb that awful precipice — look!"

The canoe was shooting onward through dim shadow very fast but more steadily, and raising my eyes from the dull green water before us — these craft are always paddled with one's face toward the bow — I looked about me hopelessly. In these days of easy travel there are doubtless many who have from a securely railed-off platform gazed down into the black depths of a Pacific Slope cañon upon a river that seems a narrow thread in the great gulf below. These will have some idea of what I saw, but they may take the word of one who knows, which is easier than making the experiment, that such places look very much worse from the bottom. Those who have not may try to picture tremendous — and the word is used with its amplest significance — walls of slightly overhanging rock, through which aided by grinding boulders and scoring shingle, the river has widened as well as deepened its channel a little every century, while between the white welter at their feet lies a breadth of troubled green where the stream flows heaped up, as it were, in the center.

In places it roared in filmy wreaths about a broken mass of stone that cumbered the channel, but elsewhere the

hollowed sides, upon which the smallest clawed creature could not have found a foothold, had been worn down into a smooth slipperiness.

"It is all so horrible," said Grace, bending back her head, so that as I glanced over my shoulder I could see her firm white neck through the laces as she stared upward at the streak of blue sky so far above. Then she turned her face toward me again, and it seemed to my excited fancy that it had grown ethereal.

"We may pass the whirlpool, and — if not — death can come no harder here than in any other place," she added.

I tried to answer, and failed miserably, feeling glad that an increasing tumult covered my silence, for I could not drive out a horrible picture of that fair face with the gold bronze hair swept in long wet wisps across it washing out, frozen still forever, into the sunlit valley, or the soft hands I should have given a life to kiss clutching in a last vain agony at the cruel stones which mocked them. Then I set my teeth, clenching the paddle until each muscle swelled as though it would burst the skin, and, with something that was divided between an incoherent prayer and an imprecation upon my lips, I determined that if human flesh and blood could save her she should not perish.

The roar of water grew louder and louder, rolling in reverberations along the scarped rock's side, until it seemed as if the few dwarf pines which clung in odd crannies here and there trembled in unison, and once more the white smoke of a fall or rapid rose up close before us. Then I could see the smooth lip of the cataract held apart, as it were, by one curved glittering ripple from the tumult beneath, and I remembered having heard the Indian packers say that when shooting a low fall one has only to keep the craft straight before the current, which is not always easy, and let her go.

"Sit quite still, Grace," I cried. "If the canoe upsets I will at once take hold of you. We shall know the worst in another few minutes now."

Her lips moved a little, and though I heard no words I fancied it was a prayer, then I turned my head forward and prepared for the struggle. I had small skill in handling canoes, but I had more than average strength, and felt thankful for it as, lifting the light cedar at every wrenching stroke, I drove it toward the fall. Then a whirling mist shot up, there was a deep booming in my ears, the canoe leaped out as into mid-air, and I could feel her dropping bodily from beneath us. A heavy splash followed, water was flying everywhere, and a boiling wave lapped in, but the paddle bent under my hand, and breathless and half-blinded we shot out down the tail rush into daylight again. One swift glance over my shoulder showed the slanting spout of water behind Grace's pallid face. The fall apparently must have been more than a fathom in three yards or so, and I wondered how we had ever come down it alive.

Then, with labored breathing and heart that thumped painfully, I plied the paddle, while the craft swung off at a tangent across the dark green whirling which, marked by white concentric rings, swung round and round a down-sucking hollow in the center. Twice we shot past the latter, and had time to notice how a battered log of driftwood tilted endways and went down, but as on the second revolution we swept toward a jutting fang of quartz I made a fierce effort, because here the stream had piled a few yards of shingle against the foot of the rock. The craft yielded to the impulse and drove lurching among the backwash. Then there followed a sickening crash. Water poured in deep over her depressed side as she swayed downward and over, and the next moment, with one hand on the ragged quartz and another gripping Grace's arm, I was

struggling in the stream. Fortunately the dress fabric held, and my failing strength was equal to the strain, for I found a foothold, and crawled out upon the shingle, dragging her after me. Then rising, I lurched forward and went down headforemost with a clatter among the stones, where I lay fighting hard for breath and overcome by the revulsion of relief, though it may have been the mere physical over-pressure on heart and lungs that had prostrated me.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN THE WATERS ROSE

PRESENTLY, while I lay upon the shingle panting, a wet hand touched my head, and looking up with dazzled eyes I saw Grace bending down beside me. The water drained from her garments, she was shivering, but at least she had suffered no injury.

"Ralph! Ralph! tell me you are not hurt!" she said, and something in her voice and eyes thrilled me through, but, though I struggled to do so, I could not as yet overcome the weakness, and lay still, no doubt a ghastly half-drowned object, with the blood from the wound the branch made trickling down my forehead, until stooping further she laid her hand on my shoulder, and there was more than compassion in the eyes that regarded me so anxiously.

Then, slowly, power and speech came back together, and covering the slender fingers with kisses I staggered to my feet.

"Thank God, you are safe!" I said, "and whatever happens, I have saved you. You will forgive me this last folly, but all the rest was only a small price to pay for it."

She did not answer, though for a moment the hot blood suffused her cheek, and I stood erect, still dazed and bewildered — for the quartz reef had cruelly bruised me — glancing round in search of the canoe. Failing to find it, I again broke out gratefully:

"Thank heaven, you are safe!"

Grace leaned against a boulder. "Sit down on that

ledge. You have not quite recovered," she said; and I was glad to obey, for my limbs were shaky, and the power of command was born in her. Then with a sigh she added very slowly: "I fear you are premature. Still, I think you are a brave man, and no Carrington was ever a coward. Look around and notice the level, and remember the daily rise."

Stupidly I blinked about me, trying to collect my scattered wits. The strip of shingle stood perhaps a foot above the river and was only a few yards wide. In front, the horrible eddy lapped upon the pebbles at each revolving swirl, and behind us rose a smooth wall of rock absolutely unclimbable, even if it had not overhung. That, however, was not the worst, for a numbing sense of dismay, colder far than the chilly snow-water, crept over me as I remembered that most mountain streams in British Columbia rise and fall several feet daily. They are lowest in early morning, because at night the frost holds fast the drainage of snow-field and glacier which feeds them on the peaks above; then, as the sun unchains the waters, they increase in volume, so that many a ford which a man might pass knee-deep at dawn is swept by roaring flood before the close of afternoon.

"Watch that stone," said Grace with a stately calmness, though first she seemed to choke down some obstruction in her throat. "There! the last wash has buried it, and when we landed the one with the red veins — it is covered several inches now — was bare."

A sudden fury seized me, and raising a clenched hand aloft I ground my heels into the shingle, while Grace looked on pityingly.

"I was almost afraid to mention it at first," she said. "I — I hoped you would take it differently."

Then at last I began to understand clearly. I flung

back my head as I answered: "It is not for my own miserable safety that I care one atom. Neither if we had gone down together in the fall would it have seemed so hard; but after bringing you in safety so far it is horrible to be held helpless here while inch by inch the waters rise. Great God! is there nothing I can do? Grace, if I had ten lives I would gladly give them all to save you!"

Again the tell-tale color flickered in her face; then it vanished, and her voice shook a little.

"I believe you," she answered. "Indeed, it seems only too probable that you gave up one when you leaped the poor horse into the river. It was done very gallantly, and now you must wait as gallantly for what that great God sends."

She seemed so young and winsome and beautiful that suddenly in place of rage a great pity came upon me, and I think my eyes grew dim, for Grace looked at me very gently as she added: "No; death comes to all of us some time, and you must not grieve for me."

But because I was young and the full tide of lusty life pulsed within me, I could not bear to think of what must follow. Again, it seemed beyond human comprehension that she, the incarnation of all that was fair and lovable, must perish so miserably, and once more I had to struggle hard to restrain a fresh outbreak of impotent fury. Presently, however, her great fortitude infected me, and with the calmness it brought there came a feeling that I must tell her all now or never. Nevertheless, I felt that she knew it already, for one glance had made many things manifest when we first entered the cañon.

"Grace," I said huskily, "I want you to listen while I answer a question which, without speaking, you asked me — Why should I, a rough railroad contractor, esteem it an inestimable privilege to freely lay down my life for you?

It is only because I love you, and have done so from the day we talked together on Starcross Moor — it seems so long ago. Listen yet. I meant never to have told you until I had won the right to do so, and had something to offer the heiress of Carrington, and I fought hard for it, toiling late and early, with a dead weight of adverse fortune against me; but all that was little when every blow was struck for your sweet sake. And, if you had chosen another, I should have kept my secret, and prayed that you might be happy. Now when, so far as worldly rank goes, we stand as equals in the valley of death, I dare open all my heart to you; and, if it must be, I should ask no better end than to enter eternity here holding your hand."

She trembled a little, great tears were brimming in her eyes, but again I read more than pity or sorrow in their liquid depths, and the next moment I had spread my wet arms about her and her head rested on my shoulder. There are some things that concern but two souls among all those on earth, and the low answer that came for the first time falteringly through her lips is to be numbered among them; but a little later, with my arm still about her, Grace smiled up at me wistfully as the remorseless waters lapped nearer.

"I loved you because you were steadfast and fearless," she said. "Sweetheart, it will not be so hard to die together now. Do you know this is all a part of the strange memories, as though I had learned somewhere and somehow what was to be. Either in dreams or a mental phantasy I saw you riding across the prairie through the whirling snow. When you strode with bronzed face, and hard hand on my bridle through the forest, that was familiar too, and — you remember the passage about Lancelot — I knew you were my own true knight. But this is not the last of the dream forecasts or memories, and there was something brighter beyond it I could not grasp. Perhaps it may be the glories

of the hereafter. I wonder whether the thought was born when that sunset flamed and flashed?"

I listened, tightening my grasp about her and shivering a little. This may have been due to physical cold, or a suggestion of the supernatural; but Grace spoke without terror, reverently, and ended:

"Ralph, have you ever thought about that other world? Shall we be permitted to walk hand in hand through the first thick darkness, darling?"

"Don't!" I cried, choking. "You shall not die. Wait here while I try to climb round those boulders; there might be a branch that would float us, or a log of driftwood in a lower eddy," and leaving her I managed with much difficulty to scale a few great water-worn masses that had fallen from above and shut out the view of the lower river. Still, though I eagerly scanned the boulders scattered here and there along the opposite bank, there was only foam and battered stone, and at last I flung myself down dejectedly on a ledge. I dare not go back just then and tell her that the search was quite hopeless, and it may have been inherited obstinacy, but I would not own myself quite beaten yet. So I lay watching the cruel water slide past, while a host of impossible schemes flashed through my bewildered brain. They all needed at least a rope, or a few logs, though one might have been rendered feasible by a small crowbar. But I had none of these things.

Meantime a few white cloudlets drifted across the rift of blue above, and a cool breadth of shadow darkened the pine on the great rocks. Something suggested a fringe of smaller firs along the edge of a moor in Lancashire, and for a moment my thoughts sped back to the little gray-stone church under the Ling Fell. Then a slow stately droning swelled into a measured boom and I wondered what it was, until it flashed on me that this was a funeral

march I had once heard there on just such a day; and it was followed by a voice reading something faint and far away, snatches of which reached me brokenly, "In the sure and certain hope," and again, "Blessed are the dead."

There was, perhaps, a reason for such fancies, though I did not know it at that time, for, as I found afterward by the deep score across the scalp, my head must have been driven against the stone with sufficient violence to destroy forever the balance of a less thickly covered brain. However, it could not have lasted more than a few moments before I knew that the funeral march was only the boom of the river, and if I would not have it as sole requiem for one who was dearer far than life to me I must summon all my powers of invention. The waters had risen several inches since I first flung myself down. Great events hang on very small ones, and we might well have left our bones in the cañon, but that when crawling over a boulder I slipped and fell heavily, and, when for a moment I lay with my head almost in the river, I could see from that level something in the eddy behind a rock on the further shore which had remained unnoticed before.

It was a dark object, half-hidden among grinding fragments of driftwood and great flakes of spume, but I caught hard at my breath when a careful scrutiny showed that beyond all doubt it was the overturned canoe. Still, at first sight, it seemed beyond the power of flesh and blood to reach it. The rapid would apparently sweep the strongest swimmer down the cañon, while the revolving pool span suggestively in narrowing circles toward the deadly vortex where the main rush from the fall went down. Second thought, however, suggested there might be a very small chance that when swept round toward the opposite shore one could by a frantic struggle draw clear of the rotary swirl into the downward flow, which ran more slackly close

under the bank. I came back and explained this to Grace, and then for the first time her courage gave way.

"You must not go," she said. "No one could swim through that awful pool, and — I am only a woman, weak after all — I could not stay here and see you drown. Ralph, it was the thought of having you beside me that gave me courage — you must not leave me alone to the river."

"It is our last chance, sweetheart," I said very slowly, "and we dare not neglect it, but I will make a promise. If I feel my strength failing, when I know I can do no more, I will come back to you. Standing here you could reach my hand as the eddying current sweeps me round. Now, wish me good fortune, darling."

Grace stooped and kissed my forehead, for even as I spoke I knelt to strip off the long boots. This was no time for useless ceremony. Then with a faint ghost of a blush she added, "You must not be handicapped — fling away your jacket and whatever would hamper you," after which, standing beside me at the edge of the water, she said very solemnly, "God bless and keep you, Ralph."

Then I whirled both hands above my head, leaped out from the quartz shelf, and felt the chilly flood part before me until, instead of dull green transparency, there was daylight about me again, and my left hand swept forward through the air with the side-stroke which in younger days I had taken much pains to cultivate. Now there was the hardness in muscles which comes from constant toil behind it, besides a force which I think was not born altogether of bodily strength, and even then I could almost rejoice to feel the water sweep past me a clear half-fathom as the palm drove backward hollowed to the hip, while the river boiled and bubbled under my partly submerged head. But I swung right around the eddy, and almost under the tail rush of the fall, while once for a moment I caught sight of Grace's

intent face as, husbanding my strength for a few seconds, I passed tossed about on the confused welter close by the quartz shelf. Then, as the circling waters hurried me a second time round and outward toward the further shore, I made what I knew must be the last effort, made it with cracking sinews and bursting lungs, and drew clear by a foot or two of the eddy's circumference. A few more strokes and an easy paddling carried me down-stream, and a wild cry of triumph, which more resembled a hoarse cackle than a shout, went up when at last I drew myself out of the water beside the canoe.

I lay on the cold stone breathing hard for several minutes; then I managed to drag the light shell out and empty her, after which I tore up a strip of the cedar flooring to form a paddle, and found that though one side was crushed the damage was mostly above flotation level. It would serve no purpose to narrate the return passage, and it was sufficiently arduous, but a man in the poorest craft with a paddle has four times the power of any swimmer, and at last I reached the shingle, which was almost covered now. Grace stood on the brink to meet me with a cry of heartfelt relief when I ran in the bows, then a momentary dizziness came upon me, as, all dripping as I was, I lifted her into the stern. After I thrust off the craft, and, struggling clear of the eddy, we shot away on the outgoing stream, she smiled as she said:

"It was splendidly done! Ralph, is it foolish — I once supposed it would be so — that because you have the strength to do these things you make me proud of you?"

There is little more to tell, and that passage through the cañon left behind it an unpleasant memory. Though it was rising all the time, the stream ran more evenly, there were no more cataracts or whirlpools, and while Grace was obliged to bail hard with — so closely does burlesque

follow on tragedy — one of my long boots, she could keep the leaks under. I did my best with the paddle, for I could see the tension was telling on her, and at last the great rock walls fell back on either hand, and dwarf pines and juniper climbed the less precipitous slopes, until these too opened out into a wide valley, and we slid forth safely into clear sunlight. Never had brightness and warmth so rejoiced me as they did after the cold damp horror of that passage through the dark rift in the earth.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETURN

IT was James Lawrence, the English rancher, and Miss Carrington who told me what happened to those we left behind after the fateful moment when the canoe first slipped clear of the shingle bank. Lawrence accompanied the party on their return journey, and it was he who suggested sending Grace and Miss Carrington across in the canoe. The river ran high that morning, and he felt dubious about the ford, because several pack-horses had already been drowned there.

The first intimation he had of anything wrong was a cry from the girl, and he saw a strip of water widen between the canoe and the bank. He ran his hardest, but made little headway, for thorny bushes and fern formed thickets along the bank, while when he reached the boulders he felt that he had come too late, because no swimmer could then overtake the canoe, even if he escaped destruction in the first rapid immediately below. Nevertheless, after a glance at the drawn face of the girl, which haunted him long afterward, as with the first shock of terror on her she labored helplessly at the paddle, he would even have made the hopeless attempt but that Colonel Carrington, who of all the trio had retained his common sense, intervened. It was not without reason that the Colonel had earned the reputation of being a hard man.

"Come back! Stop him! Geoffrey, are you mad?" he roared; and Lawrence, who had now recovered his wits, flung himself upon a man who, stripping himself to the

waist as he ran, floundered at break-neck speed among the boulders. They went down together heavily, and the next moment the runner had him by the throat, hissing through his teeth, "Let go, you fool, before I murder you!"

Lawrence was strong, however, and held fast half-choked for a moment or two, until the Colonel's cry reached them again:

"Get up, Geoffrey, you lunatic! Follow, and head them off along the bank!"

The shouts and the confusion had startled his restive horse, and by the time he had mounted the pair were on their feet again stumbling over the boulders or smashing through the undergrowth in a desperate race, with the horse blundering behind them and the canoe ahead. They might possibly have overtaken it except for the rapid, Lawrence said, but it swept like a toboggan down that seething rush, and, as realizing that it was almost hopeless, they held on, there was a clatter on the opposite slope, and they saw me break out at headlong gallop from the woods. They halted when I crawled into the canoe, for we were beyond all human help from that bank now; and, flinging himself from the saddle, Colonel Carrington stood with clenched hands and quivering lips, staring after us, so Lawrence said, out of awful eyes.

"Bravo!" he gasped at length. "He'll reach the gravel-spit. Another two good strokes — they're almost in the eddy;" but the next words were frozen on his lips, for the backwash from a boulder swept away the bows of the canoe, and the words that followed came hoarse and brokenly, "My God — he's too late!"

Colonel Carrington was right, for, as held still and spell-bound they watched, the canoe leaped down the entrance rapid and was lost in the mist of the black cañon. The Colonel said nothing further, though he groaned aloud, and

Lawrence did not care to look at him; but Ormond's face was ashy until a livid fury filled it as he turned upon the rancher.

"Confusion to you! Why must you stop me then?" he demanded.

"You would only have drowned yourself in the rapid and done nobody any good," Lawrence said.

"I wish to heaven I had," answered Ormond, with cold deliberateness. "As it is, you have helped that man to rob me again, even at the last, and I would give all I have to change places now with him."

Then, while Lawrence wondered what he meant, though when I heard the story I fully understood, the head of my horse rose for an instant out of the tumbling waters, sank, and rising, went down again, while a tremor ran through the Colonel's rigid frame, and he leaned against a hemlock with great beads of sweat on his forehead. The poor beast had doubtless been mangled against a boulder, and the sight was horribly suggestive.

"A very grim man," said Lawrence, when he narrated what happened; "but I felt most cruelly sorry for him. Didn't say very much — his sort never do; but he was in mortal anguish, and I knew how he would miss the girl."

Colonel Carrington was, nevertheless, the first to master his feelings, and his voice was steady once more when he turned to Ormond.

"Geoffrey, you will go back and send my sister round with the Indian by Tomlinson's crossing. Then you will return and overtake us in the ravine yonder. We are going to follow the crest of the cañon to — to — see what we can find."

It was a stiff climb up the ravine, trying in places to a mountaineer, but the old man held close behind his companion, and Lawrence wondered at him. He also felt

sorry for Ormond, whose task it was to overtake them, but when at last they hurried breathless through the pinewoods toward the edge of the chasm above the fall, the latter, looking like a ghost, came panting up with them. Then, standing on the dizzy brink, Colonel Carrington gazed down at the spout of green water and the whirling spray, which were dwarfed by the distance.

"That is the greatest danger, that and the whirlpool. Anything would swing round in the eddy, would it not?" he said. "Now, I want only the truth — you understand these rivers — could any white man take a canoe down there and through the pool safely?" and Lawrence, who dare not prevaricate with that gaze upon him, answered reluctantly, "I do not think so."

The Colonel's thin face twitched. "I thank you. No other possible landing place or foothold, is there? And it would take a day to go back to Tomlinson's and portage a canoe. Well, we'll go on to the end in a last hope that they have got through."

Now climbing is difficult in that region, because where the mountain slopes do not consist of almost precipitous snow-ground rock, they are clothed with forest and dense undergrowth, and it was therefore some time before the three had traversed the league or so that divided the summit from the outlet valley. Neither when they got there did they find the canoe, because when I helped Grace ashore I did not care where it went, and, once on terra firma she fainted suddenly, and then lay for a time sobbing on my shoulder in a state of nervous collapse. As she said, though a brave one, she was after all only a woman, and what had happened would have tested the endurance of many a man. At last, however, I managed to help her up a ravine leading down to the river, after which she leaned heavily on my arm as we plodded through the forest until we reached a

small rancher's shanty, where, as the owner was absent, I took the liberty of lighting his stove and preparing hot tea. Then I left Grace to dry her garments.

We must have spent several hours at the ranch, for Grace was badly shaken, and I felt that rest was needful for both of us, while, when I returned to the cabin after drying myself in the sun, she lay back in a hide-chair sleeping peacefully. So while the shadows of the firs lengthened across the clearing I sat very still, until with a light touch I ventured to rouse her. She woke with a gasp of horror, looked around with frightened eyes, then clung to me, and I knelt beside the chair with my arms about her, until at last with a happy little laugh she said:

"Ralph, I have lost my character, and you know I am a coward at heart; but, and until to-day I should not have believed it, it is so comforting to know I have a — I have you to protect me." Then she laid her hand on my brow, adding gently, "Poor forehead that was wounded in my service! But it is getting late, Ralph, and my father will be feverishly anxious about me."

Grace was right in this, because, long before we borrowed the rancher's Cayuse pony and set out again, Colonel Carrington and the others reached the bank of the river, and saw only a broad stretch of muddy current racing beneath the rigid branches of the firs. Then after they had searched the few shingle bars — the one we landed on was by this time covered deeply — the old man sat down on a boulder apart from the rest, and neither dare speak to him, though Lawrence heard him say softly to himself:

"My daughter — my daughter! I would to God I might join her."

They turned homeward in solemn silence, though perhaps a last spark of hope burned in the Colonel's breast that by some wholly unexpected chance we had reached it before

they did, because Lawrence said he seemed to make a stern effort to restrain himself when they saw only Miss Carrington sitting dejectedly near the window. Thereupon Lawrence was glad to escape, and Ormond, who rode out to gather the miners for a systematic search, left them mercifully alone.

Afterward the old man brokenly narrated what had passed, and then there was a heavy silence in the room, out of which the sunlight slowly faded, until, as Miss Carrington told me, the ticking of a nickeled clock grew maddening. At last she rose and flung the window open wide, and the sighing of the pines drifted in mournfully with a faint coolness that came down from the snow. Meantime, Colonel Carrington paced with a deadly regularity up and down, neither speaking nor glancing at her, until he started as a faint beat of horse hoofs came out of the shadows.

"Only Geoffrey returning!" he said bitterly. "But I have been listening, listening every moment for the last hour. It is utterly hopeless, I know, and we must bear the last black sorrow that has fallen upon us; but yet I cannot quite believe her dead."

The tramp of hoofs grew nearer, and the Colonel leaned out through the open casement with the hand that gripped its ledge quivering.

"That is an Indian pony, not Geoffrey's horse, and a man on foot is leading it," he said. "They are coming this way; I will meet them."

Miss Carrington, however, laid a restraining grasp upon him, and very slowly the clock ticked off the seconds until, when two figures came out through the thinning forest into the clearing, the Colonel's face grew white as death. For a moment he choked for breath, and his sister sobbed aloud when he recovered himself, for she too had seen.

"I thank a merciful Providence — it is Grace," he said.

I lifted Grace from the pony's back, led her toward the house, and saw the old man fold his arms about her. Then I heard her happy cry, and while for a time they forgot all about me, I stood holding the pony's rein and thinking. My first impulse was to go forward and claim her before them, but that was too much like taking advantage of her father's relief. Also, I felt that some things are sacred, and the presence of any stranger would be an intrusion then, while it seemed hardly fitting to forthwith demand such a reward for what any other should doubtless have done gladly. So, trusting that Grace would understand, I turned away, determined to call on the Colonel the next morning, and, though I am not sure that the result would otherwise have been different, I afterward regretted it. Now I know that any excess of delicacy or consideration for others which may cause unnecessary sorrow to those nearest us is only folly.

No one called me back, or apparently noticed me, and though with much difficulty I reached the ranch, and was hospitably entertained there, I never closed my eyes all night. I returned to the Colonel's dwelling as early as possible the next morning, and was at once received by him. The events of the preceding day had left their impression even on him, and for once his eyes were kindly, while it was with perceptible emotion he grasped my hand.

"I am indebted to you for life, and you acted with discernment as well as gallantry," he said. "You have an old man's fervent thanks, and if he can ever repay such a service you may rely on his gratitude."

I do not know why, for they were evidently sincere enough, but the words struck me unpleasantly. They seemed to emphasize the difference between us, and there was only one favor I would ever ask of him.

"You can return it now with the greatest honor it is

in your power to grant any living man," I answered bluntly. "I ask the promise of Miss Carrington's hand."

I feel sure now that there was pity in his eyes for a moment, though I scarcely noticed it then, and he answered gravely:

"I am sorry. You have asked the one thing impossible. When Miss Carrington marries it will be in accordance with my wishes and an arrangement made with a dead kinsman long ago."

I think he would have continued, but that I broke in: "But I love her, and she trusts me. Ever since I came to this country I have been fighting my way upward with this one object in view. We are both young, sir, and I shall not always be poor —" but here he stopped me with a gesture, repeating dryly, "I am sorry for you."

He paced the long room twice before he again turned toward me, saying with a tone of authority, "Sit down there. I am not in the habit of explaining my motives, but I will make an exception now. My daughter has been brought up luxuriously, as far as circumstances permitted, and in her case they permitted it in a measure even on the prairie — I arranged it so. She has scarcely had a wish I could not gratify, and at Carrington Manor her word was law. I need hardly say she ordered wisely."

I bent my head in token of comprehension and agreement as the speaker paused, and then, with a different and incisive inflection, he continued:

"And what would her life be with you? A constant battle with hardship and penury on a little prairie farm, where with her own hands she must bake and wash and sew for you, or, even worse, a lonely waiting in some poor lodging while you were away months together railroad building. Is this the lot you would propose for her? Now, and there is no reason I should explain why, after my death there will

be little left her besides an expensive and occasionally unprofitable farm, and so I have had otherwise to provide for her future!"

"There are, however, two things you take for granted," I interposed again; "that I shall never have much to offer her — and in this I hope you may be wrong — and Miss Carrington's acquiescence in your plans."

The old grim smile flickered in the Colonel's eyes as he answered: "Miss Carrington will respect her father's wishes — she has never failed to do so hitherto — and I do not know that there is much to be made out of such railroad contracts as your present one."

This was certainly true enough, and I winced under the allusion before I made a last appeal.

"Then suppose, sir, that after all fortune favored me, and there was some reason why what you look for failed to come about — all human expectation, human life itself, is uncertain — would you then withhold your consent?"

He looked at me keenly a moment, saying nothing, and it was always unpleasant to withstand the semi-ironical gaze of Colonel Carrington, though I had noticed a slight movement when quite at random I alluded to the uncertainty of life. Then he answered slowly:

"I think in that case we could discuss all this again, though it would be better far for you to consider my refusal as definite. Now I have such confidence in my daughter's obedience that on the one condition that you do not seek to prejudice her against me I do not absolutely forbid your seeing Miss Carrington — on occasion — but you must write no letters, and you may take it as a compliment that I should tell you I have acted only as seemed best in her interest. Neither should it be needful to inform you that she will never marry without my consent. And now, reiterating

my thanks, I fail to see how anything would be gained by prolonging this interview."

I knew from his face that this was so, and that further words might be a fatal mistake, and I went out hurriedly, forgetting, I am afraid, to return his salutation, though when I met his sister she glanced at me with sympathy as she pointed toward another door. When I entered this Grace rose to meet me. The time we spent in the cañon had drawn us closer together than many months of companionship might have done, and it was with no affectation of bashful diffidence that she beckoned me to a place beside her on the casement logs, saying simply, "You have bad news, sweetheart. Tell me everything."

Her father had exacted no promise about secrecy. Indeed, if the arrangement mentioned compromised a prospective husband, as I thought it did, Grace was doubtless fully acquainted with it; and I told her what had passed. Then she drew herself away from me.

"And is there nothing to be added? Have you lost your usual eloquence?" she said.

"Yes," I continued, "I was coming to it. It is this: while I live I will never abandon the hope of winning you; and, with such a hope, whatever difficulty must be grappled with first, I know that some day I shall do it."

"And," said Grace, with a heightened color, and her liquid eyes shining, "is there still nothing else?" And while I glanced at her in a bewildered fashion she continued, "Do you, like my father, take my consent for granted? Well, I will give it to you. Ralph, while you are living, and after, if you must go a little before I do, I will never look with favor upon any man. Meantime, sweetheart — for, as he said, I will not resist my father's will, save only in one matter — you must work and I must wait, trusting in what

the future may bring. And so — you must leave me now; and it may be long before I see you. Go, and God bless you, taking my promise with you."

She laid her little hand in mine, and I bent down until the flushed face was level with my own. When I found myself in the open air again, I strode through the scented shadows triumphantly. The Colonel's opposition counted as nothing then. I was sanguine and young, and I knew, because she had said it, that until I had worsted fortune Grace Carrington would wait for me.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OPENING OF THE LINE

DURING the weeks that followed I saw neither Grace nor Colonel Carrington — though the latter fact did not cause me unnecessary grief, and we heard much about his doings. From what the independent miners who strolled into our camp at intervals told us, the Day Spring shaft had proved a costly venture, and had so far failed to lay bare any traces of payable milling ore. Still, the redoutable Colonel continued with his usual tenacity, and was now driving an adit into the range side to strike the quartz reef at another level.

"There's a blamed sight more gold going into them diggings than they'll ever get out, and the man who is running them will make a big hole in somebody's bank account," said one informant meditatively. "However, there's no use wasting time trying to give him advice. I strolled round one morning promiscuous, and sat down in his office. 'See here, Colonel, you're ploughing a bad patch,' I says, 'and having a knowledge of good ones I might tell you something if I prowled through your workings.'"

"What did he say?" asked Harry, smiling at me. And the narrator expectorated disgustedly as he answered:

"Just turned round and stared — kind of combine between a ramrod and an icicle. 'Who the perdition are you?' he said — or he looked it, anyway. So, seeing him above a friendly warning, I lit out, feeling sheep-faced; and I've bluffed some hard men in my time. Since then I've

been rooting round, and I'm concluding there is good ore in that mountain, if he could strike it."

"Do you know the sheep-faced feeling, Ralph?" asked Harry mischievously. And probably my frown betrayed me, because I knew it well, though there was some consolation in the thought that this reckless wanderer of the ranges knew it also.

In any case, I had small leisure just then to trouble about the affairs of Colonel Carrington. My duty to my partners and the men who worked for us was sufficiently onerous, for we had almost daily to grapple with some fresh natural difficulty. Twice a snow-slide awakened majestic thunders among the hills at night and piled the wreckage of the forests high upon the track. Massy boulders charged down the slopes and smashed the half-finished snow-shed framing into splinters; but, rod by rod, the line stretched on, and the surveyor's good-will increased toward us. So the short weeks passed, until at last the metals led into the mining town, and its inhabitants made preparations to provide a fitting reception for the first train, the arrival of which would mark a turning-point in the wooden city's history. I can remember each incident of that day perfectly, because it also marked the change from ebb to flood in the tide of our own affairs. We sat up late the previous night calculating the amount to our debit, which proved sufficiently discouraging, and endeavoring to value on the credit side work we had done in excess of contract; but this, Harry said, was reckoning without our host, as represented by the surveyor, who, when we approached him on the subject, displayed a becoming reticence.

It was a glorious afternoon when we stood waiting beside the track, attired for once in comparatively decent garments. Harry and I had spent several hours in ingenious repairs, one result of which was that certain seams would project

above the surface in spite of our efforts to restrain them. Beneath us the foaming river made wild music in its hidden gorge, and the roar of a fall drifted up with the scent of cedars across the climbing pines, while above the hill-slopes led the gaze upward into the empyrean. But there is no need for description; we were in the mountains of British Columbia, and it was summertime.

Near at hand many banners fluttered over the timber city, and discordant strains announced the last rehearsal of the miner's band, while a throng of stalwart men laughed and jested as they gazed expectantly up the line. They had cause for satisfaction. All had waited long and patiently, paying treble value for what they used or ate, and struggling with indifferent implements to uncover the secret treasure of the ranges. Now their enterprise would not be handicapped by the lack of either plant or capital, for the promise given had been redeemed, and with the advent of the locomotive they looked for the commencement of a great prosperity.

My face, however, was somber, for Harry made some jesting comparison between it and that of a mourner at a funeral. We, too, had done our share in the building of the road, but, as far as we could see, it had signally failed to bring us prosperity.

"You can console yourself with the feeling that it's good to be a public benefactor, even if you don't get any money," said Harry cheerfully. "Did it ever strike you, Ralph, that the people who subscribe for statues make a bad choice of their models? Instead of the frock-coated director they should set up the man with the shovel — Ralph Lorimer, rampant, clad in flour bags, and heaving aloft the big axe, for instance, with the appropriate motto round the pedestal under him, 'Virtue is its own reward.' No, I'm in charge of the pulpit this afternoon, Lee."

What the shoemaker intended to say did not appear, for he smilingly abandoned the opportunity for improving the occasion. He had put on flesh and vigor, and now, instead of regarding him as a flippant worldling, which was formerly his plainly expressed opinion, he even looked up in a curious way toward my partner, and once informed me that there was a gradely true soul in him under his nonsense. The spell of the mountains and the company of broad-minded cheerful toilers had between them done a good deal for Lee. Then up on the hillside a strip of bunting fluttered from the summit of a blighted pine, the cry "She's coming!" rolled from man to man, and there was a thunderous crash as some one fired a heavy blasting charge. A plume of white vapor rose at the end of the valley, and twinkling metal flashed athwart the pines, while a roar of voices broke out and my own heart beast faster in the succeeding stillness. Enthusiasm is contagious, and a feeling of elation grew upon me. Nearer and nearer came the cars, and when they lurched clattering up the last grade the snorting of the huge locomotive and the whir of flying wheels made very sweet music to those who heard them.

Then as, with the red, quartered ensign fluttering above the head-lamp and each end platform crowded, the train passed the last construction camp, a swarm of blue-shirted toilers cast their hats into the air, and the scream of the brakes was drowned in a mighty cheer, while I found myself cheering vehemently among the rest. The blasts ceased at the funnel, and as the slackening couplings clashed while the cars rolled slowly through the eddying dust I started in amaze, for there were two faces at the unglazed windows of the decorated observation car which I knew well, but had never expected to see there. Martin Lorimer waved his hand toward me as the train stopped, my cousin Alice stood

beside him smiling a greeting, and with shame I remembered how long it was since I had sent news to her.

"Have you seen a ghost?" asked Harry. "You are a regular Don Juan. Who is that dainty damsel you are honoring with such marked attention, to the neglect of your lawful business. Don't you see the surveyor is beckoning you?"

This was true, for, standing among a group of elderly men who I supposed were railway magnates or guests of importance, the surveyor, to my astonishment, called me by name.

"I have been looking for you all along the track," he said. "Must present you to these gentlemen. We have been discussing your work."

Several of the party shook hands with me frankly, while the names the surveyor mentioned were already well-known in Winnepeg and Montreal, and have since become famous throughout the Dominion. One with gray hair and an indefinable stamp of authority touched my shoulder with a friendly gesture. "I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lorimer before," he said. "We have some business together, and expect you to join us in the opening ceremony. Meantime, you will excuse me — Jardine, I'm thankful it is your turn. There is evidently a deputation coming."

Preceded by tossing banners, and a band which made up in vigor what it lacked in harmony, a procession approached the train, and its leader commenced reading something awkwardly from a written paper in time to an undercurrent of semi-ironical encouragement. I saw some of the visitors' eyes twinkle at his sentiments, but for the most part they listened with becoming gravity; and when a man with gold eyeglasses had suitably replied, there was a wild scuffle for even a foothold on the train. One musician smote another,

who strove to oust him from a platform, with his cornet, which promptly doubled in; the big drum rolled down a declivity with its owner hurling back wild language in frantic chase of it; then the locomotive snorted, and, with the bell clanging, it hauled the first train into the wooden town amid the acclamations of the populace. After this I had an opportunity for greeting my uncle, and we looked at each other with mutual curiosity. Martin Lorimer seemed thinner and older. His hair was freely sprinkled with white now, but his eyes were as keen as ever, and I could read approval in them. Then as Alice came toward us from an adjoining car he laughed boisterously.

"What do you think of your cousin, lass?" he said. "He left us an obstinate stripling, and this country has hammered him into a man. Thou art a credit to the land that bred thee, lad. Ralph, I wronged thee sorely, like the blundering fool I am, and first of all I ask thy forgiveness."

Martin Lorimer could speak excellent modern English when he liked, and usually did so, but, and in this he resembled others of his kind, in times of excitement he used the older form which is still the tongue of Lancashire. I made some haphazard answer, but it seemed appropriate, for Alice smiled upon us as we shook hands heartily. When I turned toward her a feeling of pity came upon me — she looked so wan and frail. Still her eyes were bright with good-will, and her voice seemed to tremble a little as she said, "I am so glad to see you and your uncle good friends again. He was very stupid, and I told him so."

"You did, lass," said Martin Lorimer, "many a time, and we had words upon it. We're a thick-headed people, Ralph, except for our womenkind, and if we're slow to think evil we're slow to change. The Lord forgive me for pig-headed folly."

"May I show you this wonderful township?" interrupted

one of the railroad magnates approaching with a bow. "Mr. Ralph Lorimer, I am desired to invite you to the celebration dinner. It's the chief's especial wish that you should be present," and he drew Alice away, leaving my uncle and myself alone.

"We'll go and see the city, too," said the former. "Already the air of your mountains makes me young again. Never heard how I cheated the doctors, eh? — they badly wanted to bury me, but I'll tell you all about it another time. Now I feel like a school lad out for a holiday."

He seemed in excellent spirits, and with me the bright sunshine, the uproarious rejoicings of the crowd, and the events of the past half-hour combined to banish all depression, while many an acquaintance smiled as he glanced at the grizzled man in tourist tweeds who chatted gaily and gazed about him with wondering eyes.

"You breed fine men over here," he said, "Never saw a finer set anywhere. Bless me! look at that one striding toward us with the air of a general; stamp of blood about him; where did he get it? And yet by the look of him that fellow could do a hard day's work with any British navvy."

"He can," I answered smiling, "and he was taught at a British university. Now he hews logs for a living, and sometimes works for me. Let me introduce you to my uncle from Lancashire, Martin Lorimer — Lance Chisholm."

"Very glad to meet you, sir," said the latter. "I promised to look in on Morgan in the saloon; will you join us?"

When we elbowed our way through the noisy room toward the bar Chisholm proffered the usual refreshment, and with a comprehensive wave of his hand bade the tender, "Set them up!"

Martin Lorimer stared bewilderedly at the row of glasses deftly flung in front of him, and there was a roar of laughter

when, glancing at me appealingly, he said, "It's a hospitable country; but, bless us, Ralph! are we expected to drink all of this? And I'm a churchwarden!"

A bearded giant in blue jean smote him on the shoulder. "You've got the right grit in you, stranger," he said. "Start right in, and do the best you can," while the old man joined in the merriment when I explained that the invitation included all in the vicinity who cared to accept it. I left him with Harry and Johnston presently because one of the guests brought word that Alice desired to see me, and I found her on the veranda of the best house the citizens could place at the strangers' disposal. There were ladies among them. I drew two chairs into a corner where a flowering creeper screened half the trellis, and from where we sat a wonderful vista rolled away before us. Alice had changed but little, save that she seemed even more delicate. I had changed much, and now as we chatted with a resumption of ancient friendliness I wondered how it was that her innate goodness and wisdom had never impressed me more in the old days. Few would have called her handsome at first sight, but she was dowered with qualities that were greater than beauty.

"You will wonder what brought us here," she said at length, "and your uncle forgot to tell you. Ever after that — unfortunate mistake — he talked constantly about our headstrong lad, but when he lay dangerously ill for weeks together I was unable to write you. The doctors had little hope most of the time, and one said he recovered chiefly because he had made his mind up he would not die, and when they forbade all thought of business and recommended travel he made me buy the latest map of Canada, and we are now staying at the new mountain chalet. My own health has not improved latterly, and that helped to decide him. We left the main line on the prairie and went south in search of you, and when we could only discover that you had gone to

British Columbia I am sorry to say that my father expressed his disappointment very forcibly — but you know his way. Then while we stayed at the chalet we read about the opening of the new line, and he grew excited at a mention of your name. 'We'll go right down and see that opening, lass,' he said. 'I've a letter to one of the railroad leaders, and I'll make him invite us;' and so we came. When my father sets his heart on anything he generally obtains it. Now we will talk about Canada."

The flowering creeper partly hid us, but it left openings between, framing the prospect of glittering peak and forest-filled valley with green tracery, while warm sunlight beat through. So, in contrast to the past, I found it comforting to lounge away the time there with a fair companion, while glancing down the glistening metals I told how we had built the line. Alice was a good listener, and the tale may have had its interest, while — and this is not wholly due to vanity — no man talks better than when he speaks to a sympathizing woman of the work that he is proud of. It was no disloyalty to Grace, but when once or twice she laid her thin hand on my arm I liked to have it there, and see the smile creep into her eyes when I told of Lee's doings. So the minutes fled, until at last a shadow fell upon us, and I saw Grace pass close by with her father. For an instant her eyes met mine, then I felt that they rested on my companion, whose head was turned toward me confidentially and away from Grace, and I fumed inwardly, for she spoke to the Colonel and passed on without a greeting.

"That is surely Miss Carrington," said Alice looking up later with a faintly perceptible trace of resentment. "Why did she not speak to either of us?"

It was a troublesome question, because I could not well explain what my exact relations were with Grace, nor how her father's presence might perhaps restrain her, so that I

was glad when Martin Lorimer suddenly joined us. It seemed fated that circumstances should array themselves against me. The rest of the afternoon was spent in hilarious merriment, and, though as a rule the inhabitants of that region are a peaceful folk, a few among them celebrated the occasion by breaking windows with pistol shots and similar vagaries. Still, even those who owned the glass took it in good part; and, as darkness fell, considerably more of the populace than it was ever intended to hold squeezed themselves into the wooden building which served as city hall, while the rest sat in the dust outside it, and cheered for no particular reason at regular intervals.

The best banquet the district could furnish was served in the hall, and I sat opposite the surveyor near the head of one table, with my uncle and Alice close by, and Grace and Colonel Carrington not far away. Cedar sprays and branches of balsam draped the pillars, the red folds of the beaver ensign hung above our heads, and as usual the assembly was democratic in character. Men in broadcloth and in blue jean sat side by side — rail-layer, speculator, and politician crowded on one another, with stalwart axe-men, some of whom were better taught than either, and perhaps a few city absconders, to keep them company; but there was only good-fellowship between them. The enthusiasm increased with each orator's efforts, until the surveyor made in his own brusque fashion, which was marked by true Western absence of bashfulness, the speech of the evening. Some one who had once served the English press sent a report to a Victoria journal, of which I have a copy, but no print could reproduce the essence of the man's vigorous personality which vibrated through it.

"What built up the Western Dominion, called leagues of wheat from the prairie, and opened the gate of the mountains — opened it wide to all, with a welcome to the Pacific

Slope paradise?" he said. "The conundrum's easy — just the railroad. Good markets and mills, say the city men, but where do the markets come in if you can't get at them? What is it that's binding London over the breadth of Canada with China and Japan — only the level steel road. You said, 'We've gold and silver and timber, but we're wanting bread, machines, and men.' We said, 'We'll send the locomotives; it will bring you them;' and this railroad keeps its promise — keeps it every time. So we cut down the forest, and we blew up the mighty rocks, we drove a smooth pathway through the heart of the ranges — and now its your part to fill the freight cars to the bursting.

"We'll bring you good men in legions; we'll take out your high-grade ore, but you'll remember that the building of this railroad wasn't all luxury. Some of those who laid the ties sleep soundly beside them, some lost their money, and now when you have thanked the leaders in Ottawa, Montreal, and Victoria, there are others to whom your thanks are due — the men who stayed right there with their contracts in spite of fire and snow, staking dollar after dollar on a terribly risky game. There were considerable of them, but most of you know this one — I'm sharing my laurels with him —" and as a thunder of applause which followed the halt he made died away he turned toward me. "Stand right up, Contractor Lorimer — they're shouting for you."

There was further clamor, but I scarcely heard it, and I longed that the floor of the hall might open beneath me. Still, there was clearly no escape, and I stood up under the lamp-light, noticing, as one often notices trifles at such times, how like a navvy's my right hand was as it trembled a little on the white table-cloth. A sea of faces were turned toward me expectantly, and I pitied their owners' disappointment, but I saw only four persons plainly — my uncle, and Alice, who flashed an encouraging glance at me, Colonel

Carrington looking up with a semi-ironical smile, and Grace. I could not tell what her expression meant.

I should sooner have faced a forest fire than that assembly, but at least my remarks were brief, and I felt on firmer ground when memories of the rock-barred track and the lonely camps rose up before me, and there was a shout at the lame conclusion, "We gave our bond and we tried to keep it, as the rest did too. We were poor men, all of us, and we are poor men still; but every one owes something to the land that gives him bread. So we tried to pay back a little, and perhaps we failed; but at least the road is made, and we look forward hoping that a full tide of prosperity will flow into this country along the rails we laid."

The applause swelled and deepened when Harry Lorraine stood up, silver-tongued, graceful, smiling, and called forth roars of laughter by his happy wit; and when he had finished Martin Lorimer, who was red in the face, stretched his arm across the table toward me, and held up a goblet, saying: "For the honor of the old country! Well done, both of you!"

"The fun is nearly over. We can talk business," said the gray-haired man from Winnipeg, on my right side. "I may say that we are satisfied with the way you have served us, and, though a bargain is a bargain, we don't wish to take an unfair advantage of any one; so the surveyor will meet you over the extras. He is waiting with the schedule, and by his advice we're open to let you this contract for hewn lumber supplies. Here's a rough memo; the quantity is large, and that is our idea of a reasonable figure."

I glanced at the paper with open pleasure, but the other checked me as I began to speak.

"Glad you will take it! It's a commercial transaction, and not a matter of thanks," he said. "Settle details with the surveyor."

I spent some time with the latter, who smiled dryly as he said, "Not quite cleaned out yet? Well, it's seldom wise to be too previous, and you can't well come to grief over the new deal. Wanted again, confound them! Sail in and prosper, Lorimer."

He left a payment order which somewhat surprised me, and when I stood under the stars wondering whether all that had happened was not too good to be true, Harry came up in search of me. I grabbed him by the shoulder and shook the paper before him.

"Our friend has acted more than fairly," I said. "We can pay off all debts, and I have just concluded a big new, profitable deal!"

"That will keep," said Harry, laughing; "another matter won't. They're going to haul out the visitors' picnic straight away, and they show good judgment. A sleeper on the main line will form a much more peaceful resting-place than this elated hamlet to-night. Your uncle wants to see you, and Miss Carrington is waiting beside the cars."

I found Alice and Martin Lorimer beside the track, the latter fuming impatiently, while the locomotive bell summoned the passengers; and as I joined them Grace walked into the group before she recognized us. Alice was the first to speak, and I saw the two faces plainly under the lighted car windows, as she said:

"I am glad to meet you again, Miss Carrington, and am sorry I missed you this afternoon. I was too busy giving my cousin good advice — it's a privilege I have enjoyed from childhood — to recognize you at first."

Grace's expression changed, and I thanked Alice in my heart for what I believe few women would have done. Then there was a shriek of the whistle, and a bustle about the train; and as Grace moved toward the car she said softly in passing:

"It was a fitting consummation. Better times are coming, Ralph, and I am proud of you."

"Am I never to speak to thee, lad?" said Martin. "There's nothing would please me better than to wait and see the fun out; but Alice, she won't hear of it. Come to see us, and stay a month if you can. Anyway, come to-morrow or the day after. I have lots to tell thee. Oh, hang them! they're starting. Alice, wouldn't that lady take charge of thee while I stay back?"

"Get into the car, father," said the girl, with a laugh. "You mustn't forget you're the people's warden. Good-bye, Ralph, until we see you at the chalet."

"All aboard!" called a loud voice; the couplings tightened; and I waved my hat as, followed by a last cheer, the train rolled away.

"Is it true that all has been settled satisfactorily?" asked Harry, presently, and when I answered, he added: "Then we're going back to finish the evening. Johnston's to honor the company with stump speeches and all kinds of banjo eccentricities. You are getting too sober and serious, Ralph; come along."

I refused laughingly, and spent at least an hour walking up and down through the cool dimness that hung over the track to dissipate the excitement of a day of varied emotions. Then I went back to our shanty and slept soundly, until about daybreak I was partly wakened by the feasters returning with discordant songs, though I promptly went to sleep again. I never heard exactly what happened in the wooden town that night, but there was wreckage in its streets the next morning, and when I opened my eyes the first thing I saw was our partner Johnston slumbering peacefully with his head among the fragments of his shattered banjo.

CHAPTER XIX

A GENEROUS OFFER

IT was late in the afternoon of the next day when Harry and I sat figuring in our shanty, while Johnston lay on a heap of cedar twigs sucking at his pipe and encouraging us languidly.

"I never could stand figures, and that's perhaps why I'm poor," he said. "Go on, you are doing famously, and, though Ralph can't add up correctly to save his life, I'll take your word for it."

He formed a characteristic picture of the free lance as he lay there, bronzed and blonde-bearded, with his massy limbs disposed in an attitude of easy grace, awaiting the result with a careless unconcern until Harry flung a long boot at him as a signal for silence.

"As the surveyor told you, Ralph, we can't well lose money on this last venture, even if we wanted to," said Harry at length. "You'll observe I'm almost getting superstitious. Now, on cashing the order, we can repay your loan, keeping back sufficient to meet emergencies, while with the rest one of us could return to Fairmead and plough every available acre for next spring's sowing. Many things suggest that you are the one to go. Johnston and I with the others could get the timber out during the winter — we have worked in the snow before — and I would join you in the spring. That, however, again raises a point that must be settled once for all. Are we to hold on to our first ambition, or turn contractors?"

Again there was a silence through which the roar of the river reached us brokenly, and for some minutes I breathed the smell of hot dust and resinous twigs that entered the open doorway.

"I hold on to the first," I said finally.

"And I stand by you," answered Harry.

Simultaneously we glanced at Johnston, who looked up with the same gay indifference he had manifested when we floundered half-fed, knee-deep in slush of snow. "I'll save you unpleasant explanations," he said. "I'm a stormy petrel, and the monotonous life of a farmer would pall on me, so I'll see you through the railroad contract, and then — well, I'll thank you for a space of pleasant comradeship, and go on my way again. The mountain province is sufficiently good for me, and some day I'll find either a gold mine in it, or, more likely, a grave. If not, you can count on a visit whenever I am hard up and hungry."

The words were typical of the man, though their undercurrent of melancholy troubled me; but, for we knew he spoke the truth in regard to the farming, the matter was settled so. I should much have preferred that Harry return to Fairmead, but it was clear that the task most suited me. Perhaps Johnston guessed my reluctance, for he said playfully: "Is not banishment worse than snow slides or the high peak's frost, and what are all the flowers of the prairie to the blood-red rose of the valley that was grafted from Lancastrian stock?"

Thereupon Harry deftly dropped an almost-empty flour bag on his head, and the consultation broke up amid a cloud of white dust.

"This," remarked Johnston, "is the beginning of riches. Two days ago, he would have carefully swept up the fragments to make flapjacks."

Thus it came about that the next morning I boarded the

main line express, and traveled first-class with a special pass, while as luck would have it the conductor, who evinced an unusual civility when he glanced at the autograph thereon, was the same man I had worsted the memorable night when I arrived a penniless stranger on the prairie. "If you want anything in these cars, just let me know," he said.

"I will," I answered, thrusting back the wide-brimmed hat as I looked at him. "The last time we traveled together you were not so accommodating. We had a little dispute at Elktrail one night in the snow."

"General Jackson!" exclaimed the conductor. "But you didn't travel with that name on your ticket then. Say, it was all a mistake and in the way of business. You won't bear malice?"

He vanished without awaiting an answer, and I leaned back on the cushions chuckling softly, after which, fishing out my pipe, I sank into a soothing reverie. There was no doubt that this kind of traveling had its advantages, and it appeared equally certain that I had earned a few days' luxurious holiday, while, as the blue wreaths curled up, the towering pines outside the windows changed into the gaunt chimneys of smoky Lancashire. Then they dwindled to wind-dwarfed birches, and I was lashing the frantic broncos as they raced the hail for the shelter of a bluff, until once more it seemed to be autumn and a breadth of yellow wheat stood high above the prairie, while the rhythmic beat of wheels changed to the rattle of the elevators lifting in the golden grain. Here, however, roused by a scream of the whistle as the long train swept by a little station, I found that the pipe lay among feathery ashes on my knee, and an hour had passed, while I knew that under the touch of sleep my thoughts had turned mechanically into the old channel.

It was toward noon when I left the cars at a station looking down upon a broad reach of sunlit river which

wound past maples, willows, and a few clearings through a deep valley. Martin Lorimer and Alice met me on the platform, and his greeting was hearty.

"We have watched every train since we last saw you," he said. "Alice, though she won't own it, has been anxious, too. Never spent such an interesting time as I did up yonder, and we're going to make it pleasant for you here. Of course, you'll stay with us a week or two?"

The old man's face fell as I answered that time was pressing, and I must return the following day, while for some reason Alice turned her face aside, but she laughed pleasantly.

"Your uncle has been talking of nothing else the last two days," she said. "I am glad I did not leave him with those wild men in the rejoicing city. Some of them, however, seemed very nice. Meanwhile, I think lunch is waiting for us."

We reached the pretty chalet hotel, which was hardly completed then, though it is a famous resort now, and it was a new experience, after faring hardly on doughy flapjacks and reistit pork of our own cooking, to sit at a well-ordered table covered with spotless linen. Still better did it seem to see Alice smiling upon me across the flowers in the glasses and sparkling silver, and Martin Lorimer's cheery face as, while he pressed the good things upon me, we chatted of old times and England. It is only through adversity and hardship that one learns to appreciate fully such an interlude.

My uncle had, however, not yet recovered his strength, and when later his eyes grew heavy Alice whispered that he usually slept in the heat of the afternoon, and I was glad to follow her into a garden newly hewn out of the forest. We sat there in scented shadow under the branches of giant redwoods, with the song of rippling water in our ears, and I remember taking Alice into my confidence about the mys-

terious loan. She listened with interest, and once more I noticed how ill she looked.

"You have more good friends than you think, Ralph; and it was of service to you, was it not?"

"Yes," I answered with emphasis. "Of the greatest service! Perhaps it saved us from ruin, but at first I almost decided not to touch it."

Alice laughed, a clear laugh that mingled musically with the call of a wood pigeon in the green dimness above.

"You need hardly tell me that — all great men have their weaknesses; but seriously, Ralph, don't you think if the good friend desired to keep it a secret it is hardly fair to try to find him out? No, from what you tell me, I hardly think you will unravel the mystery while the donor — lender, I mean — lives. Besides, even if you never do, you can repay it by assisting some hard-pressed comrade in distress. Yes, I should fancy the person who lent it would prefer that way. However, I want to tell you about your sister Aline. She has grown into a handsome young woman, too handsome almost to fight her own way unprotected in the world, but she is like yourself in some respects, and will neither live with us nor let your uncle help her. She is teaching now — do you know what women are paid for teaching in some private schools? And I don't think she is happy. The last time I saw her I almost cried afterward, though she would only tell me that she was choking for sunlight and air. Even her dress was worn and shabby. Ralph, you know how old friends we are, and I have been wondering — you really must be sensible — whether I could help her through you?"

Something stung me to the quick, and I clenched one hand savagely, for in the grim uphill battle I had nearly forgotten Aline. It was so long since I had seen her, and when each day's hard work was done we were almost too tired to think. Still, my brow was crimson with shame when I re-

membered that my sister went, it might be, scantily fed, while what plans I made were all for my own future and Grace.

"That is my part," I answered hotly. "She should have written frankly to her brother."

Alice stopped me. "You do not understand women, Ralph, and she knew that you too were struggling. Neither do I see how you can help her now, and it would be a favor to me. It is beyond the power of any vigorous man with a task for every moment to realize what it means to sit still weak and helpless and know that even wealth cannot bring respite from constant pain. Active pleasure, work and health have been denied me by fate, and my life cannot be a long one. It may be very short, though your uncle will not allow himself to believe it, and I long to do a little good while I can. Ralph, won't you help me?"

With a shock, I realized that she spoke only the plain truth. Indeed, her thin eager face contracted then, and ever afterward I was glad that moved by some impulse I stooped and reverently kissed the fragile hand.

"You were always somebody's good angel, cousin," I said; "but I am her brother, and this time I can help. I am going back to the farm at Fairmead, and, if she is longing for open air, do you think she would come and keep house for me?"

Alice blushed as she drew away the white fingers, but she showed her practical bent by a cross-examination, and eventually she agreed that though there were objections the plan might be feasible.

"You write to her by the next mail," she said, "and I will write too — no, it would be better if I waited a little. Why? You must trust my discretion — even your great mind cannot grasp everything. Now I want you to tell me all about Miss Carrington."

Alice had a way with her that unlocked the secrets of many hearts, and the shadows had lengthened across the lawn before the narrative was finished. I can still picture her lying back on the lounge with hands clasped before her, a line of pain on her brow, and the humming birds flashing athwart the blossoms of the arrowhead that drooped above her. Then, glancing straight before her toward the ethereal snows, she said with a sigh:

"I can see trouble in store for both of you, but I envy her. She has health and strength, and a purpose to help her to endure. Ralph, there is always an end to our trials if one can wait for it, and you both have something to wait for. Hold fast, and I think you will win her — and you know who will wish you the utmost happiness."

Presently we went down together to the boulders of the river, and watched the steelhead salmon pass on in shadowy battalions as they forced their way inland against the green-stained current, while Alice, whose store of general knowledge was surprising, said meditatively:

"Theirs is a weary journey inland from the sea, over shoal, against white rapid, and over spouting fall, toward the hidden valleys among the glaciers — and most of them die, don't they, when they get there? There's a symbol of life for you, but I sometimes think that, whether it's men or salmon, the fighters have the best of it."

We talked of birds and fishes, and of many other things, while once a big blue grouse perched on a fir bough and looked down fearlessly within reach of her, though when the wrinkles of pain had vanished Alice seemed happy to sit still in the warm sunshine speaking of nothing at all. Still, even in the silence, the bond of friendship between us was drawn tighter than it ever had been, and I knew that I felt better and stronger for my cousin's company.

It was some time after dinner, and the woods were dark-

ening, when Martin Lorimer and I sat together on the carved veranda. There was wine on the table before us, and the old man raised his glass somewhat hurriedly, though his face betokened unmistakable surprise when again I mentioned the loan. Then he lit a very choice cigar, and when I had done the same he leaned forward looking at me through the smoke, as changing by degrees into the speech of the spinning country, he said:

"You'll listen and heed well, Ralph. You went out to Canada against my will, lad, and I bided my time. 'He'll either be badly beaten or win his footing there, and either will do him good,' I said. If you had been beaten I should have seen to it that my only brother's son should never go wanting. Nay, wait 'til I have finished, but it would not have been the same. I had never a soft side for the beaten weakling, and I'm glad I bided. Now, when you've proved yourself what Tom's son should be, this is what I offer thee. There's the mill; I'm old and done, and while there's one of the old stock forward I would not turn it over to be moiled and muddled by a limited company. Saving, starving, scheming, I built it bit by bit, and to-day there's no cotton spun in Lancashire to beat the Orb brand. There'll be plenty of good men under thee, and I'm waiting to make thee acting partner. Ay, it's old and done I'm growing, and, Ralph Lorimer, I'm telling thee what none but her ever guessed before — I would have sold my soul for a kind word from thy mother."

For a time, almost bewildered by the splendid offer, I stared blankly into the eddying smoke, while my thoughts refused to concentrate themselves, and I first wondered why he had made it to me. Now I know it was partly due to the staunch pride of race and family that once held the yeomen of the dales together in foray and feud, and partly to a fondness for myself that I had never wholly realized.

Then it became apparent that I could not accept it. Grace would pine in smoke-blackened Lancashire, as she had told me, and I knew that the life of mill and office would grow intolerable, while the man who acted as Martin Lorimer's partner would have small respite from it. There was Harry also, who had linked his future with my great project. But the offer was tempting after the constant financial pressure, and for another minute the words failed me.

"I am awaiting thy answer, lad," said Martin Lorimer.

Then I stood up before him as I said slowly: "You are generous, uncle — more than generous, and it grieves me that the answer can only be — no. Give me a few moments to explain why this must be so. I could never settle down to the shut-in life; and half-hearted work would only be robbery. You would demand his best from your partner, wouldn't you?"

"I should; brain and body," said the old man, grimly watching me with hawk-like eyes, for there was a steely underside to his character.

I leaned one elbow on the back of a chair as I continued: "I could not give it. Besides, I have set my heart on winning my own fortune out of the prairie — I am in honor bound to my partner Lorraine in this, and — I can never leave Canada until the lady I hope to marry some day goes with me. You saw her at the opening ceremony — Miss Carrington."

Martin Lorimer smote the table, which, when excited, was a favorite trick of his.

"Thy wife!" he said stupidly. "Art pledged to marry Miss Carrington of all women, lad? And does she care for thee?"

"I trust so," I answered slowly, as I watched the frown deepen on the old man's face. I dreaded the next question, which came promptly:

"And what does the iron-fisted Colonel say as to thee for a son-in-law?"

It took me at least five minutes to explain, and I felt my anomalous position keenly during the process, while, when the story was finished, Martin Lorimer laughed a harsh dry laugh.

"Ralph, thou'rt rash and headstrong and a condemned fool besides," he said. "Thee would never have made a partner in the Orb mill. Thou'rt Tom's bairn all through, but I like thy spirit. Stand up there, straight and steady, so, while I look at thee. Never a son of my own, lad; thou'rt the last of the Lingdale folk, and I had set my heart on thee. Ay, I'm the successful spinner, and I paid for my success. It's hard to keep one's hands clean and be first in the business; but there's no one better knows the sign; and travel, and maybe Miss Carrington, has put that sign on thee. Once I hoped — it's past and done with, I'm foolish as well as old; but as that can never be, I'm only wishing the best of luck to thee."

He gulped down a glass of the red wine and wiped his forehead, while his voice had a hard note in it as he continued: "Her father's a man of iron, but there's iron, too, in thee. I had my part in the people's struggle when Lancashire led the way, and then after a trick at the election I hated him and all his kind. I've a better reason since for hating him. We can beat them in brain and muscle, our courage is as good as theirs, and yet, if you weld the two kinds together, there's not their equal in the world. He's proud of his robber forbears, but there was one of thine drew a good bow with the archers at Crecy. Ralph, thy news has stirred me into vaporing, and the man who built the Orb mill is prating like a child. Ay, I'm grieved to the heart — and I'm glad. Fill up thy glass to the brim, lad — here's God bless her and thee."

There followed a clink of glasses, and some of the wine was spilt. I could see the red drops widen on the snowy tablecloth, and then Martin Lorimer gripped my hand in a manner that showed no traces of senile decay, saying somewhat huskily as he turned away:

"I want time to think it over, but I'll tell thee this. Hold fast with both hands to thy purpose, take the thrashings — and wait, and if ever thou'rt hard pressed, with thy back right on the wall, thou'lt remember Martin Lorimer — or damn thy mulishness."

They gave me the same advice all round, and perhaps it was as well, for of all the hard things that fall to the lot of the man who strives with his eyes turned forward the hardest is to wait. Still, it was something to have won Martin Lorimer's approval, for I had hitherto found him an unsympathetic and critical man, who bore in his person traces of the battle he had fought. There were those who called him lucky; but these had lain softly and fared well while he starved and wrought, winning his way by inches until he built up out of nothing the splendid trade of the Orb mill.

None of us was talkative that evening, but fervent good wishes followed me when I went out with the east-bound train the next day, and until the dusky pines hid her, closing round the track, I saw cousin Alice's slight figure with her face turned toward the departing train.

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN TO THE PRAIRIE

WE were busy during the two days that followed my return, for there was much to be arranged; but at last all was settled satisfactorily. The surveyor had obtained me free transport back to the prairie for two teams that would not be needed, and Harry had promised to take charge of operations in my place. He was young for the position, or would have been considered so in England, but across the Atlantic much of the hard work is done by very young men, and I could trust his discretion, so only one thing remained to prevent my immediate return to Fairmead. I must see Grace before I went, and after considering the subject at length I determined to ride boldly up to the Colonel's ranch and demand an interview. Even if this were refused me I should not be worse off than before, and I had found that often in times of uncertainty fortune follows the boldest move.

I rode out under the starlight from our camp, for if all went well I hoped to turn my back on the mountain province by sunset, and if Harry guessed how I proposed to spend the interval he made no direct reference, though he said with unusual emphasis at parting, "I wish you good luck, Ralph — in everything."

"I'll second that," added Johnston, wringing my hand as I bent down from the saddle, for they had walked beside me down the trail; then I shook the bridle and they vanished into the gloom behind. It may have been mere coincidence,

or a conceit of Johnston's playful fancy, for when I dipped into the valley his voice came ringing after me, "Oh, who will o'er the downs so free! Oh, who will with me ride?"

The next line or two was lost in a clatter of hoofs on shingle, and then once more the words rose clearly above the dewy pines, "To win a blooming bride!" More of the ballad followed, for Johnston trolled it lustily as he strode back to the shanty, and the refrain haunted me as I swept on through the cool dimness under the conifers, for the lilt of it went fittingly with the clang of iron on quartz outcrop and the jingle of steel. It also chimed with my own thoughts the while, and the last lines broke from my lips triumphantly when we raced out of the dusky woods into the growing light under a giant rampart of mountains, behind whose peaks a red flush broadened in the east. The mists rolled back like a curtain, the shadows fled, and the snow, throwing off its deathly pallor, put on splendors of incandescence to greet the returning day. Nowhere does dawn come more grandly than in that ice-ribbed wilderness of crag and forest; but as I watched it then I accepted the wondrous spectacle merely as an augury of brighter days for Grace and myself, and for a last time the ballad echoed across the silent bush as I drove the good horse splashing through a ford.

It was afternoon when, much more sedately, for the beast was tired and I had misgivings now, we splashed through another river into sight of Colonel Carrington's dwelling, whose shingled roof was faintly visible among the pines ahead; while once more it seemed that fortune or destiny had been kind to me. A white dress moved slowly among the rough-barked trunks, and because a thick carpet of withered needles deadened the sound of hoofs I came almost upon Grace before she saw me. She was gazing at the ground; the long lashes hid her eyes, but I fancied that

a suspicious moisture glistened under them, and there was trouble stamped on her face. Then as I swung myself from the saddle she ran toward me with a startled cry and stopped irresolutely. But I had my arms about her even as she turned half-away, and I said eagerly:

"Something has happened, sweetheart. You must tell me what it is."

She sighed, and, trembling a little, clung more tightly to my arm when, after tethering the horse, we walked slowly side by side through the shadow of the great fir branches.

"I was longing for you so," she said. "As you say, something has happened, and there is no one to whom I can tell my troubles. What I feared has happened, for this morning Geoffrey Ormond asked me to marry him."

"Confusion to him!" I broke out, driving one heel deep into the fir needles; and when Grace checked me, laying both hands on her shoulders, I held her fast as I asked, "And what did you say?"

She smiled faintly as she answered, "This is not the age of savagery, Ralph; your fingers are bruising me. What answer could I give him after my promise to you? I said, 'No.'"

"Then the folly is done with, and there will be an end to his presumption," I answered hotly. But Grace sighed again as she said:

"No, this is not the ending. You are fierce and stubborn and headstrong — and I like to have you so; Geoffrey is cool and quiet and slow, and, I must say it, a chivalrous gentleman. I could not tell him all; but he took my answer gracefully, saying he would respect it in the meantime, but would never give up hope. Ralph, I almost wonder whether you would have acted as becomingly."

Perhaps it was said to gain time; and, if so, I took the bait and answered with bitterness:

"He has been trained and polished and accustomed to the smooth side of life. Is it strange that he has learned a little courtesy? Again I say, confound him! I am of the people, stained with the soil, and roughened by a laborer's toil; but, Grace, you know I would gladly give my life to serve you."

"You are as God and your work have made you," was the quiet answer; and, drawing closer to me, she added, "And I would not have you otherwise. Don't lapse into heroics, Ralph. What you did that day in the cañon will speak better than words for you. Instead you must listen while I tell you the whole story. As it was with you and your cousin, Geoffrey and I — we are distantly related too — were always good friends. He was older, and, as you say, polished, and in many ways I looked up to him, while my father was trustee for him under a will, and when he joined the army my father continued, I understand, to manage his property. Still — and I know now that I must have been blind — I never looked upon Geoffrey as — as a possible husband until twelve months ago. Since then my eyes have been opened, and I understand many things — most of all that my father wished it, for he has told me so, and that Geoffrey is heavily interested financially in his ventures. I know that he has sunk large sums of money in the mine, and they have found no ore, while I heard a chance whisper of a mortgage on Carrington. Yet Geoffrey has never even hinted to me that he was more than a small shareholder. My father has grown aged and worn lately, though only those who know him well could tell he was carrying a heavy load of anxiety. He has always been kind to me, and it hurt, horribly, to refuse to meet his wishes when he almost pleaded with me."

The scent of summer seemed to have faded out of the air, the golden rays that beat in between the great trunks lost their brightness, and only one way of escape from the

situation presented itself to me as again the refrain of the ballad jingled through my memory. It was also a way that suited me. If Grace and I could not be married with the Colonel's consent, we could without it; and I thanked Providence that she need suffer no actual hardships at Fairmead now, while with her advice and encouragement the future looked brilliant. We could reach the flag station in two hours if we started at once. And then, with a chill, I remembered my promise to the Colonel, and that I stood, as it were, on a parole of honor. Yet a rash promise seemed a small thing to wreck two lives; and, saying nothing, I set my teeth tightly as I remembered hearing my father once say long ago, "I am thankful that, if we have our failings, none of us has ever broken a solemn promise." Martin Lorimer too — and some called him keen, in distinction to scrupulous — I remembered, accepted a draft he had been clearly tricked into signing, and duly met it at maturity, though, when the affair was almost forgotten, he made the man who drew it suffer. And so the inward struggle went on, until there were beads of perspiration on my forehead and Grace said, "Ralph, you look deathly. Are you ill?"

I did not answer, and was afterward thankful that perhaps fate intervened to save me, for I almost felt that Grace would have yielded to pressure then. There were footsteps in the forest, and, as instinctively we drew back behind a fir, Colonel Carrington walked savagely down an open glade. He passed close to us, and, believing himself alone in that solitude, had thrown off the mask. His face was drawn and haggard, his hands were clenched, and for once I read fear of something in his eyes; while Grace trembled again as she watched him, and neither of us spoke until he vanished among the firs.

"Ralph," she said quietly, "twice I have seen him so when he did not know it. Perhaps it was meant that this should

happen, for now I know that even were there no other obstacle I could not leave him. Sweetheart, could you expect the full duty to her husband from the woman who had signally failed in her duty to others?"

"No," I answered with a groan. "But is there no hope in the present? — nothing that I can do?"

She drew my face down toward her as she answered, "Only work and wait, sweetheart," and her voice sank to a low whisper. "Heaven forgive me if I wrong him in telling you. But there are no secrets between us, and you saw his face. I fear that inadvertently he has lost much of Geoffrey's money in rash ventures, as well as his own. Geoffrey would never trouble about finance, and insisted on leaving his property in his hands, while, though my father is fond of speculation and control, I am afraid he is a poor business man."

She shivered all through, and said nothing for a few moments, while I tried to soothe her; then she added slowly:

"I must stand beside him in this trouble; and if the worst comes I do not ask you to leave me — it would be wrong and foolish, and I know you too well. But, though I have read how many women have done such things, I will never marry Geoffrey. It would be a crime to myself and to him, and he is far too good for such treatment. Sweetheart, I must leave you, and it may be so very long before we meet again; but I hope brighter days will dawn for us yet. You will help me to do what I ought, dearest?"

Ten minutes later I rode through the woods at a breakneck gallop, reviling fate and all things incoherently, until, as the horse reeled down an incline amid a mad clatter of sliding shale, Ormond, of all men, must come striding up the trail with an air of tranquil calm about him. There is a certain spice of barbarism, I suppose, in most of us, and in my frame of mind the mere sight of his untroubled face filled me with bitterness. It seemed that, in spite of

her refusal, he felt sure of Grace; and something suggested that a trail hewn at Government expense was free to the wealthy well-born and the toiler alike, and I would not swerve a foot to give him passage. So only a quick spring saved him from being ridden down, while I laughed harshly over my shoulder when his voice followed me: "Why don't you look ahead, confound you?"

It was possibly well that I had trouble with the teams in the stock car on the railroad journey, and that work in plenty awaited at Fairmead, for the steady tramp behind the plough stilts served to steady me. After three weeks' endurance, the man I had hired to help mutinied, and stated plainly that he had no intention of either wearing himself to skin and bone or unmercifully overworking dumb cattle, but I found satisfaction in toiling on alone, often until after the lingering darkness fell, for each fathom of rich black clod added to the long furrow seemed to lessen the distance that divided me from Grace. Then little by little a measure of cheerfulness returned, for sun, wind, and night dew had blended their healing with the smell of newly-turned earth, a smell I loved on the prairie, for it told that the plough had opened another channel into treasure locked fast for countless ages. So hope was springing up again when I waited one morning with my wagon beside the railroad track to welcome my sister Aline.

I could scarcely believe my eyes when she stepped down from the car platform, for the somewhat gawky maiden, as I used to term her in our not altogether infrequent playful differences of opinion, when similar compliments were common, had grown into a handsome woman, fair-skinned, but ruddy of color, as all of us were, and I was embarrassed when to the envy of the loungers she embraced me effusively. The drive home across the prairie was a wonder to her, and it touched me to notice how she rejoiced in its breadth and

freedom, for the returning luster in her eyes and the somewhat too hollow face told their own tale of adversity.

"It is all so splendid," she said vaguely. "A poor lunch, you say; it is ever and ever so much better than my usual daily fare," and her voice had a vibration that suggested tearfulness. "This is almost too good to be true! I have always loved the open space and sun, and for two weary years I lived in a dismal room of a dismal house in a particularly dismal street, where there was nothing but mud and smoke, half-paid work, and sickening drudgery. Ralph, I should ten times over sooner wash milk-pans or drive cattle in a sunlit land like this."

I laughed approvingly as she ceased for want of breath, realizing that Aline had much in common with myself; while the rest of the journey passed very cheerfully, and her face was eager with curiosity when I handed her down at the house. She looked around our living room with disdainful eyes.

"It is comfortable enough, but, Ralph, did you ever brush it? I have never seen any place half so dirty."

I had not noticed the fact before. Indeed, under pressure of work we had usually dispensed with small comforts, superfluous cleanliness I fear among them, and Fairmead was certainly very dirty, though it probably differed but little from most bachelors' quarters in that region. The stove-baked clods of the previous ploughing still littered the floor; the dust that was thick everywhere doubtless came in with our last thrashing; and the dishes I had used during the last few weeks reposed unwashed among it. But Aline was clearly a woman of action.

"You shockingly untidy man!" she said severely. "Carry my trunk into my room, quick. I am going to put on an old dress, and make you help me clean up first thing. Tired? — after lounging on soft cushions — when I tramped

miles of muddy streets carrying heavy books every day. You won't get out of it that way. Go away, and bring me some water — bring lots of it."

When I came back from the well, with a filled cask in the wagon, she had already put on a calico wrapper and both doors and windows were open wide, and I hardly recognized the dwelling when we had finished what Aline said was only the first stage of the proceedings. Then I lighted the stove, and, returning after stabling the horses, found her waiting at the head of a neatly-set table covered with a clean white cloth, which she had doubtless brought with her, for such things were not included in the Fairmead inventory. The house seemed brighter for her presence, though I sighed as I pictured Grace in her place, and then reflected that many things must be added before Fairmead was fit for Grace. I had begun to learn a useful lesson in practical details. Aline noticed the sigh, and plied me with questions, until when, for the nights were getting chilly, we sat beside the twinkling stove, I told her as much as I thought it was desirable that she should know. Aline was two years my junior, and I had no great confidence as yet in her wisdom.

She listened with close attention, and then said meditatively: "I hope that some day you will be happy. No, never mind explaining that you must be — marriage is a great lottery. But why, you foolish boy, must you fall in love with the daughter of that perfectly awful man! There was some one so much nicer at home, you know, and I feel sure she was very fond of you. Alice is a darling, even if she has not much judgment in such matters. Oh, dear me, what am I saying now!"

"Good Lord!" I said, startled by an idea that hitherto had never for a moment occurred to me. "I beg your

pardon; but you are only a young girl, Aline. Of course you must be mistaken, because — it couldn't be so. I am as poor as a gopher almost, and she is a heiress. Don't you realize that it's utterly unbecoming for any one of your years to talk so lightly of these matters."

Aline laughed mischievously. "Are you so old and wise already, Ralph?" she asked. "Brotherly superiority won't go very far with a girl who has earned her own living. As you say, I should not have told you this, but you must have been blinder than a mole — even your uncle saw it, and I am quite right." She looked me over critically before she continued, as though puzzled: "I really cannot see why she should be so, and I begin to fancy that a little plain speaking will be good for my elder brother."

I checked the exclamation just in time, and stared at her while I struggled with a feeling of shame and dismay. It was not that I had chosen Grace, but it was borne in on me forcibly that besides wounding the feelings of the two persons to whom I owed a heavy debt of gratitude, I must more than once, in mock heroic fashion, have made a stupendous fool of myself. Such knowledge was not pleasant, though perhaps the draught was beneficial, and if plain speaking of that kind were wholesome there was more in store, for hardship had not destroyed Aline's inquisitorial curiosity, nor her fondness for comments, which, if winged with mischief, had truth in them. Thus, to avoid dangerous subjects, I confined my conversation to my partners and railroad building.

"That is really interesting," she vouchsafed at length. "Ralph, you haven't sense enough to understand women; but axes, horses, and engines, you know thoroughly. I'm quite anxious to see this Harry, and wonder whether I could tame him. Young men are always so proud of them-

selves, and one finds amusement in bringing them to a due sense of their shortcomings, though I am sorry to say they are not always grateful."

Then I laughed as I fancied the keen swordplay of badinage that would follow before she overcame either Johnston or Harry, if they ever met, and I almost wondered at her. This slip of a girl — for after all, she was still little more — had faced what must have been with her tastes a sufficiently trying lot, but it had not abated one jot of her somewhat caustic natural gaiety, and there was clearly truth in my partner's saying: "One need not take everything too seriously."

When with some misgivings I showed Aline her room she pointed out several radical defects that needed immediate remedy, and I left her wondering whether I must add the vocation of a carpenter to my already onerous task, and most of that night I lay wide awake thinking of what she had told me. When I rose early the next morning, however, my sister was already down and prepared an unusually good breakfast while I saw to the working beasts, though she unhesitatingly condemned the whole of the Fairmead domestic utensils and crockery.

"I am breaking you in gently," she said with a patronizing air. "You have used those cracked plates since you came here? Then they have lasted quite long enough, and you cannot fry either pork or bacon in a frying-pan minus half the bottom. Before you can bring a wife here you will need further improvement; yes, ever and ever so much, and I hope she will be grateful to me for civilizing you."

CHAPTER XXI

THE STOLEN CATTLE

I HAD broken a further strip of virgin prairie, besides ploughing, with hired assistance, part of the already cultivated land, before the Indian summer passed. All day pale golden sunlight flooded the whitened grass, which sometimes glittered with frostwork in early morning, while as the nights grew longer, the wild fowl came down from the north. Aline took a strange interest in watching them sail slowly in endless succession across the blue, and would often sit hidden beside me at twilight among the tall reeds of the creek until with a lucky shot from the Marlin I picked up a brant-goose, or, it might be, a mallard which had rested on its southward journey, somewhat badly shattered by the rifle ball. Then, when frost bound fast the sod and ploughing was done, she would ride with me toward a distant bluff, where I hewed stouter logs than grew near us for winter fuel. Already she had grown fuller in shape and brighter in color with the pure prairie air.

Jasper paid us frequent visits, and seemed to enjoy being badly defeated in a verbal encounter with Aline, after which he would confine his talk to cattle-raising, which of late had commenced to command increased attention on the prairie.

"This is too much a one-crop country. Stake all on your wheat yield, and when you lose it you're busted," he said, soon after my return. "Now what's the matter with running more cattle? They'll feed themselves in the

summer; and isn't there hay enough in the sloos if you want to keep them? — while one can generally get a good fall profit in Winnipeg. I've been picking up cheap lots all year, and if you have any money to spare I'll let you in reasonably."

"You speak like an oracle, Mr. Jasper," said Aline. "My brother is what you might call a single-crop man. One thing at one time is enough for him. Ralph, why don't you try a deal in cattle?"

The same thing had been running through my own mind, and the result was that I wrote Harry, who, being of a speculative disposition, arranged for an interim payment, and sent me a remittance, which was duly invested in a joint transaction with Jasper, who had rather over-purchased.

"I'm a little pressed for payments just now," he said. "Want to hold my wheat, and can't afford eight per cent. interest. The beasts are fattening all the time, and there'll be a high-class demand in Winnipeg presently for shipment to Europe."

He was right; and I began to have a respect for Aline's judgment when the papers reported that prices were rising fast, and stock-salesman firms sent circulars to this effect into the districts. But, when I conferred with Jasper, he advised me to hold on. "The figures are climbing," he said, "and they'll reach high-water mark just before the ice closes direct shipment."

At last the frost commenced in earnest, and I prepared to settle down for the winter. There were improvements to be made to the granary, implements, harness, and stables, in anticipation of the coming year's campaign, besides alterations in the house; for I felt that many things might happen before next autumn, and I desired that Fairmead should be more nearly ready if wanted to receive its new mistress.

Again, however, fate intervened, for, instead of a round of monotonous work, many stirring events were crowded into that winter. The first happened, as usual, unexpectedly, and came nearly ruining our cattle-trade venture. To understand it satisfactorily it is necessary to commence the narrative at the beginning.

It was a chilly night after a warm day. I sat beside the stove mending harness, while Aline criticized the workmanship and waxed the twine for me. The last mail had brought good news from Harry, and I felt in unusual spirits as I passed the awl through the leather, until there was a creak of wagon wheels outside, followed by a pounding on the door.

"It's too bad," said Aline. "We are both tired after our ride, and I was looking forward to a chance for giving you good advice, and a cozy evening. Now some one is coming to upset it all."

She was not mistaken, for when I opened the door a neighbor said, "I've brought you Mrs. Fletcher. Met her walking to Fairmead across the prairie. No; I guess I'm in a hurry, and won't get down."

It was with no great feeling of pleasure that I led the visitor into the house; and it is curious that as I helped her down from the wagon something should recall Harry's warning: "That fellow Fletcher will bring more trouble on you some day."

He had done enough in that direction already, and though I did not wish Aline to hear the story, I was glad she was there, for preceding events had taught me caution. So, making the best of it, I placed a chair beside the stove, for Minnie Fletcher explained who she was, and then, while Aline sat still looking at her with an apparent entire absence of curiosity which in no way deceived me I waited impatiently. Minnie had not improved since I last saw

her. Her face was thin and anxious, her dress — and even in the remoter corners of the prairie this was unusual — was torn and shabby, and she twisted her fingers nervously before she commenced to speak.

"I had expected to find you alone, Ralph," she said; and though I pitied her, I felt glad that she had been disappointed in this respect. "However, I must tell you; and it may be a warning to your sister. Tom has fallen into bad ways again. He is my husband, Miss Lorimer, and I am afraid not a very good one."

I could not turn Aline out on the prairie, and could only answer, "I am very sorry. Please go on," though it would have relieved me to make my own comments on the general conduct of Thomas Fletcher.

"It was not all his fault," she added. "The boys would give him whisky to tell them stories when he went to Brandon for the creamery, and at last he went there continually. He fell in with some men from Winnipeg who lent him money, and I think they gambled in town-lots, for Tom took the little I had saved, and used to come home rambling about a fortune. Then he would stay away for days together, until they dismissed him from the creamery, and all summer he had never a dollar to give me. But I worked at the butter-packing and managed to feed him when he did come home, until — Miss Lorimer, I am sorry you must hear this — he used to beat me when I had no more money to give him."

Aline looked at her with a pity that was mingled with scorn: "I have heard of such things, and I have seen them too," she said. "But why did you let him? I think I should kill the man who struck me."

Minnie sighed wearily. "You don't understand, and I hope you never will. Ralph, I have tried to bear it, but the life is killing me, and I have grown horribly afraid

of him. Moran, a friend of the creamery manager, offered me a place at another station down the line, but I have no money to get there and I cannot go like this. Tom is coming back to-night, and I dare not tell him, so I wondered whether you would help me."

"Of course he will," said Aline, "and if your husband comes here making inquiries I hope I shall have an opportunity for answering him."

I had the strongest disinclination to be mixed up in such an affair, but I could see no escape from it. There were even marks of bruises on the poor woman's face, and when, promising assistance, I went out to see to the horses and think it over, Minnie Fletcher burst into hysterical sobbing as Aline placed an arm protectingly around her. She had retired before I returned, for I fancied that Aline could dispense with my presence and I found something to detain me.

"Ralph, you are a genius," Aline said when I told her that I did not hurry back, "I have arranged to lend her enough to buy a few things, and to-morrow I'm going to drive her in to the store and the station. No, you need not come; I know the way. Oh, don't begin to ask questions; just try to think a little instead."

I allowed her to have her own way. Indeed, Aline generally insisted on this, while with many protestations of gratitude Minnie Fletcher departed the next morning, and I hoped that the affair was ended. In this I was disappointed, for, returning with Jasper the next day from an outlying farm, I found Aline awaiting me in a state of suppressed excitement. She was paler than usual, and moved nervously, and the Marlin rifle lay on the table with the hammer drawn back.

When Jasper volunteered to lead the horses in she dropped limply into a chair.

"I have spent a terrible afternoon, Ralph. In fact,

though I feel ashamed of myself, I have not got over it yet."

I eased the spring of the rifle and inquired whether some wandering Blackfoot had frightened her.

"No," Aline answered, "The Indians are in their own way gentlemen. It was an Englishman. Mr. Thomas Fletcher called to inquire for his wife, and — and — he didn't call sober."

Aline choked back something between a laugh and a sob before she continued: "He came in a wagon with another little dark man with a cunning face, and walked into the room before I could stop him. 'I want my runaway wife, and I mean to find her. Who the deuce are you — another of them?' he said."

I found it hard work to keep back the words that seemed most suitable, and perhaps I was not altogether successful, while Aline's forehead turned crimson and she clenched her hand viciously as she added:

"I told him that I was your sister, and he laughed as he said — he didn't believe me. Then he swore horribly, and said — oh, I can't tell you what he said, but he intended to ruin you, and would either shoot his wife or thrash her to death, while the man in the wagon sat still, smiling wickedly, and I grew horribly frightened."

The rattle of harness outside increased, and turning I saw Jasper striding away from the wagon, which stood near the open doorway, while Aline drew in her breath as she continued: "Then Fletcher said he would make me tell where his wife was, and I determined that he should kill me first. He came toward me like a wild beast, for there were little red veins in his eyes, and I moved backward round the table, feeling perfectly awful, because he reeked of liquor. Then I saw the rifle and edged away until I could reach it, and he stopped and said more fearful things, until the

man jumped out of the wagon and dragged him away. I think Fletcher was afraid of the other man. So I just sat down and cried, and wondered whether I should have dared shoot him, until I found there wasn't a cartridge at all in the rifle."

After this Aline wept copiously again and while, feeling both savage and helpless, I patted her shoulder, calling her a brave girl, Jasper looked in.

"I won't stop and worry Miss Lorimer now," he said shortly. "I'm borrowing a saddle, and will see you to-morrow. Good evening."

He kept his promise, for the next morning, when Aline was herself again, he rode up to the door and came in chuckling.

"I guess I have a confession to make," he said, "Couldn't help hearing what your sister said, though I kept banging the harness to let you know I was there, so I figured as to their probable trail and lit out after them. Came up with the pair toward nightfall by the big sloo, and invited Mr. Fletcher to an interview. Fletcher didn't seem to see it. He said he wouldn't get down, but mentioned several things — they're not worth repeating — about his wife and you, with a word of your sister that settled me.

"'I'm a friend of Miss Lorimer's. Are you coming down now,' says I.

"'I'm not,' says Thomas Fletcher; so I just yanked him right out on to the prairie, and started in with the new whip to skin him. Asked the other man if he'd any objections, but if he had he didn't raise them. Then I hove all that was left of Fletcher right into the sloo, and rode home feeling considerably better."

He laughed a big hearty laugh, and then started as Aline came out of an inner room.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Jasper," she said. "There

are people with whom one cannot argue, and I think that thrashing will do him good. I hope that you did it thoroughly."

Jasper swung down his broad hat, fidgeted, and said awkwardly, "I didn't figure on telling you, but if ever that man comes round here again, or there's any one else scares you, you won't forget to let me know."

Aline glanced straight into the eyes of the speaker, who actually blushed with pleasure as she said: "I will certainly promise, and I shouldn't desire a better champion, but there is at present no necessity to send you out spreading devastation upon the prairie."

Jasper looked idiotically pleased at this, and for a time we heard no more of Thomas Fletcher, who nevertheless had not forgotten the incident. As the former had anticipated, the demand for shipping cattle still increased, and when it was announced that several large steamers were awaiting the last load before the St. Lawrence was frozen fast, Jasper rode west to try to pick up a few more head, and informed me that he would either telegraph or visit Winnipeg to arrange for the sale before returning. News travels in its own way on the prairie, and we afterward decided that Fletcher, who had returned to his deserted home, must have heard of this. Jasper had been gone several days when a man in city attire rode up to Fairmead with two assistants driving a band of stock. He showed me a cattle-salesman's card, and stated that he had agreed with Jasper to dispose of our beasts on commission, and as the latter was waiting in Winnipeg, he asked me to ride over to his homestead to obtain delivery. This I did, and afterward accompanied him to the railroad, where I saw the cattle put safely on board a stock train, and early the next morning I returned, feeling that I had done a good stroke of business.

The same afternoon, while Aline prepared a meal, I sat writing a letter to Harry, telling him with much satisfaction how well our investment had resulted. Aline listened with a smile to my running comments, and then remarked dryly:

"I think you have forgotten your usual caution for once, Ralph. You should have gone with them, and seen the sale. I didn't like that man, and once or twice I caught him looking at you in a way that struck me as suspicious. I suppose you are sure the firm he represented is good?"

"It's as good as a bank," I answered, and then grew almost vexed with her, for Aline had an irritating way of damping one's enthusiasm. "Now try to say something pleasant, and I'll buy you a pair of the best fur mittens in Winnipeg when we get the money."

"Then I hope you will get it," said Aline, "for I should like the gloves. Here is another cattleman going south."

She placed more plates on the table, while, throwing down the pen, I looked out of the window. Here and there the dry grasses were buried in snow, and a glance at the aneroid suggested that we might have to accommodate the visitor all night, for the appearance of the weather was not promising. He came on at good pace, wrapped in a short fur coat, and I noticed that he did not ride altogether like the prairie-born. When he dismounted I led his horse into the stable before I ushered him into the room. The meal was almost ready, and we expected him to join us as a matter of course. He was a shrewd-looking young man with a pleasant face, and bowed gracefully to Aline as he said in a straightforward way:

"I thank you for your kindness, madam, and must introduce myself — James Heysham, of Ross & Grant, high-class cattle-salesmen. Best market prices, immediate settlements guaranteed, reasonable commission, and all the rest

of it. Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lorimer; here's our card. I rode over from the railroad on the way to Jasper's, to see if I could make a deal with you. Now's the time to realize on your stock, and Ross & Grant the best firm to entrust them to. Don't want to accept your hospitality under false pretenses, and there are still a few prejudiced Englishmen who look down on the drummer. Once waited on a man called Carrington — and he wasn't even civil."

"Sit down," I said, laughing. "This is my sister, and at least we can offer you a meal, but you are too late to sell our stock. I have just returned from shipping Jasper's as well as my own under charge of a new partner of Gardner's."

Heysham looked puzzled. "It's a reliable firm — almost as good as our own," he said. "You must not smile, Miss Lorimer; when one earns a living by that talk it's hard to get out of it. But they're conservative, and never send drummers around. Besides, there's only Gardner and his brother — they haven't a partner. Now I wonder whether "— and the last words were unintelligible.

An uneasy feeling commenced to grow on me, and our guest looked thoughtful.

"You suspect something, Mr. Heysham," said Aline, "and you ought to tell us what it is. I want to know exactly what you meant when you added 'Confidence men.'"

Then I started, and Heysham bowed as he answered: "You are evidently new to the wicked ways of this country, Miss Lorimer. I meant that some unprincipled person has, I fear, unfortunately taken your brother in. I have suspicions. Was he a little dark man, or perhaps it was another, rather stout and red-faced? Still I'm puzzled as to how they acquired the local knowledge and learned enough about your business to fool you."

"No," I answered with a gleam of hope, "he was neither;" but Aline broke in:

"The man you mention drove here in a wagon some weeks earlier, and I know how he got the local knowledge — the other, with the red face, was Thomas Fletcher. He lived on the prairie, Mr. Heysham, and there must have been three in the plot."

I rose from the table, flinging back my chair, but Heysham nodded gravely.

"Exactly; there are three of them. Your sister has made it all clear," he said. "I know the party — they've been engineering various shady deals in estate and produce, and now, when Winnipeg is getting uncomfortably warm, this is evidently a last coup before they light out across the boundary. The dark man was a clerk in the stock trade — turned out for embezzlement — once, you see. Still, they can't sell until to-morrow, and we might get the night train. No chance of trade hereabout, you say; then, for the credit of our market, if you'll lend me a fresh horse, I'm going right back to Winnipeg with you. Sit down, and finish your dinner; you'll want it before you're through."

I looked at Aline, who was equal to the occasion. "You must certainly go," she said. "Even if there is a blizzard, I shall be safe enough."

So presently she buttoned the skin coat about me, slipped a flask of spirits into the pocket; and just before we started kissed me, saying, "Take care of yourself, and do your utmost. There are all poor Jasper's cattle besides our own. Mr. Heysham, I thank you, and whenever you pass this way remember there's a hearty welcome for you at Fairmead."

"I am repaid already, madam," said Heysham as we rode away.

CHAPTER XXII

A RACE WITH TIME

A DREARY ride lay before us, for already the afternoon drew toward its close, and the light drifts were eddying under a bitter wind. The pale sun was still in the heavens, but a gray dimness crept up from the grass-land's verge toward it, against which the patches of snow gleamed lividly. However, I thought little about the cold, for with careless stupidity I had allowed a swindler to rob my partner, and a succession of blizzards would not have stopped me then. Heysham, though uninterested, seemed equally determined, and rode well, so the long miles of grass rolled behind us. Now a copse of birches flitted past, now a clump of willows, or the tall reeds of a sloo went down with a great crackling before us, then there were more swelling levels, for our course was straight as the crow flies from horizon to horizon, and we turned aside for no obstacle.

It was dusk when with lowered heads we charged through the scattered birches of a ravine bluff, and far down in the hollow beneath I caught the dull gleam of snow-sprinkled ice.

"It's a mean-looking gully," gasped Heysham. "I guess that creek's not frozen hard, and it's pretty deep. Say, hadn't we better lead our horses?" and I flung an answer over my shoulder:

"That will just make the difference between catching and missing the train. I'm going down in the saddle."

"Then of course I'm going too," said Heysham breath-

lessly. "Your neck is worth as much as mine is anyway."

For the next few moments I saw nothing at all but the shadowy lines of birch stems that went reeling past. A branch struck Heysham's horse, and swerving, it jammed his leg against a tree; then there was a crash as my own beast, blundering, charged through a thicket where the brittle stems snapped like pistol-shots, but the salesman was close behind me, and with a shout of "No bridge for miles. I'll show you the way over," I drove my horse at the creek.

The quaggy banks were frozen hard now. They were also rough and ploughed up by the feet of cattle, which had come there to drink before the frost, and the leap looked horribly dangerous, for I dare not trust the ice; but the beast got safely off and came down with a great crackling amid thinly frozen mud and reeds. There was a splash and a flounder behind me, and then as we staggered forth Heysham came up abreast, with the water dripping from his horse, and I found breath to exclaim:

"Well done! I never should have thought a city man could bring a horse down there."

"Thanks!" said Heysham, with more than a suspicion of dryness. "In this enlightened country one must earn one's bread as one can, but I wasn't brought up to the drummer's calling. Used to ride with — but that has nothing to do with you, and I'm hoping you'll strike the railroad on the shortest possible line. It wouldn't be nice to spend to-night on the prairie."

There could be no doubt on this point, for when we reached the levels darkness had closed down and the air was thick with uplifted snow which smarted our eyes and made breathing difficult, while, for the first time, I commenced to have misgivings. Heysham had understated the case, for unless we struck the railroad we might very well freeze to death on the prairie. I explained this to him, and gave

him directions how he could find a farm by following the creek; but he laughed.

"It's an exciting run," he said, "and even life in Winnipeg grows monotonous. Lead on, I'm anxious to be in at the finish."

The snow came down in earnest before we had made two more leagues, and, steering partly by the wind and partly by instinct of direction, I held on half-choked and blinded, more and more slowly, until, when at last the case looked hopeless, Heysham shouted, for a telegraph post loomed up.

"You have reached the railroad, anyway," he said. "The only question is — how far from the station are we?"

We drew rein for a few moments beside the graded track, and shook the snow from our wrappings as we debated the simple question whose issues were momentous. The horses were worn out, we were nearly frozen, and the white flakes whirled more and more thickly about us.

"We can only go and see, and the track at least will guide us," I said at last. "I don't think the station can be many miles away."

The rest of the journey left but a blurred memory of an almost sightless struggle through a filmy haze, in which we occasionally lost each other and touch with the guiding poles, until at last, caked thick with wind-packed snow, we caught sight of a pale glimmer, and fell solidly, as it were, out of the saddle in the shelter of the station. Here, however, a crushing disappointment awaited us.

"Stopping train passed two hours ago," said the station agent. "Won't be another until the Montreal express comes through. Heard the stock cars passed Brandon by daylight — they'll be in Winnipeg now."

"You have one move left," said Heysham. "Hire a special! Comes high, of course, but it's cheaper than losing

your cattle. They can't sell before to-morrow; and you won't be hard on a plundered man, agent? That locomotive ought to take us through."

"Can't cut schedule prices," was the answer, after I had explained. "I haven't a single car, but I was saving Number Forty to haul in wheat, and if she doesn't strike a snow-block, and old Robertson's in the humor, she'll land you in Winnipeg before daylight to-morrow. It's cutting things fine, however."

We put our horses in the hotel stable, managed as a special favor to obtain some food in a basket, and then climbed into the locomotive cab, where the Ontario mechanic stood rubbing his hands with waste while a grimy subordinate flung fuel into the roaring furnace.

"She's the best machine for a hard run on this road," he said, as he clutched the lever with professional pride. "All you have to do is to sit tight, and I'll bring you in on time."

Then, panting heavily, Number Forty rolled out from the station on to the lonely waste, and when, as we jolted over the switches, the lights died out behind, Robertson became intent as he shoved the lever home. For a moment the big drivers whirred on the snow-greased line, then the wheel-treads bit the metals, and the plates commenced to tremble beneath our feet. Staring out through a quivering glass I could see a white haze rising and falling ahead as the wild gusts came down, driving an icy coldness through the vibrating cab, while, when these passed, there was only the glare of the huge head-lamp flickering like a comet down the straight-ruled track.

Robertson nodded to his fireman, for Heysham had told him the story, and presently the vibration grew yet sharper. The gaunt telegraph-posts no longer swept past in endless files, but reeled toward us under the fan-shaped blaze huddled all together in a fantastic dance, while willow bluffs

leaped up out of the whiteness and vanished again as by magic into the dim prairie. The snow from above had ceased temporarily. Then a screaming blast struck the engine, wrapping it about in a dense white cloud that glittered before the lamp, the glasses rattled, and an impalpable powder, that seemed to burn the skin, drove in through every opening. Robertson glanced at his pressure-gauge.

"She's doing her best," he said, "and she'll need to. I guess we'll find drifts in the hollows, and the snow will come down again presently. It's only coming up now."

I ought to have known better, but, although a British custom is more honored in the breach than the observance in Western Canada, I had met men who could pocket their pride, and, after fumbling in my wallet, I held out a slip of paper, saying, "She's doing splendidly. I wish you would buy Mrs. Robertson something with this."

"No, sir!" was the prompt answer. "You can keep your bill. If that fraud gets in ahead of you you'll probably want it. I get good pay, and I earn it, and you're not big enough to give presents to me."

A new arrival might have been astonished. I only felt that I had deserved the rebuke, and was thankful that Aline had slipped the flask and some of Martin Lorimer's cigars into my pocket, while Robertson smiled broadly as in defiance of his orders he emptied the silver cup. It was a gift from my cousin Alice.

"I apologize. Should have remembered it," I said bluntly.

Then we were racing through stiller air again, with the driving cloud behind; for each of the curious rushes of wind that precedes a prairie storm keeps to a definite path of its own. Several times, with a roar of wheels flung back to us, we swept through a sleeping town, where thin frame houses went rocking past until the tall elevators shut them

in, and again there was only a dim stretch of prairie that rolled up faster and faster under the front trailing-wheels.

At last, when the lights of Brandon glimmered ahead, Heysham fell over the fireman as the locomotive jumped to the checking of the brake, and a colored flicker blinked beside the track. The glare of another head-lamp beat upon us as we rolled through the station, while amid the clash of shocking wheat-cars that swept past I caught the warning:

"Look out for the snow-block east of Willow Lake! Freight-train on the single track; wires not working well!"

"I guess we'll take our chances," said Robertson; and Number Forty panted louder, hurling red sparks aloft as he rushed her at an up-grade. Still, his brows contracted when, some time later, he beckoned me, and I saw a wide lake draw near with silky drifts racing across its black ice. They also flowed across the track ahead, while beyond it the loom of what might be a flag station was faintly visible against a driving bank of cloud.

"Snow's coming off the ice," he said. "Hold fast! She may jump a little when I ram her through."

The pace grew even faster. We were racing down an incline, and now, ice, station, and prairie alike were blotted out by a blinding whiteness; while presently I was flung backward off my feet, and would have fallen but that I clutched a guard-rail. The whole cab rattled, the great locomotive lurched, and a white smother hurtled under the lamp glare, until once more the motion grew even, and we could feel the well-braced frame of iron and steel leap forward beneath us. Engineer Robertson swayed easily to the oscillation as, with one side of his intent face toward me, he clutched the throttle lever, until he called hoarsely as his fingers moved along it. Then, even while the steam roared in blown-down wreaths from the lifting valve, the lever was straight at wide-open again, and I caught my

breath as I made out another yellow halo with something that moved behind it in the snow ahead.

"It's the freight pulling out of the siding. I can't hold Number Forty up before she's over the switches. I guess we've got to race for it," he said.

The fireman did something, and, with a shower of half-burned cinders from her funnel and a mad blast of the whistle, Number Forty pounded on. Heysham's face was paler than before, and the disc of yellow radiance grew nearer and brighter. A faint flash appeared below it, a deeper whistle reached us brokenly, and I remembered two hoarse voices.

"They're opening the switches! That's come on," one of them said. "Trying to check the freighter! There'll be an almighty smash if they don't!"

The other was apparently Heysham's: "And two rascally confidence men will be skipping for the border with the proceeds of what should have been Ross & Grant's cattle."

I said nothing. It did not seem that talking would do any good, and the engineer might not have welcomed my advice. The great light was very close. I could see the cars behind it and hear the grind of brakes, while a man was bent double over a lever where the blaze of our headlamp ran along the ground. The engine rocked beneath us; there was a heavy lurch as the fore-wheels struck the points; then Robertson laughed exultantly and wiped his greasy face. In front lay only the open prairie and flying snow, while the black shape of the freight-train grew indistinct behind.

"It was a pretty close call. Snow blurred the lights, and I guess the gale has broken a wire," he said. "Them folks never expected us, but they were smart with the switches. I'll say that for them."

"Good man!" said Heysham. "She's a grand machine. Next to riding home first in a steeplechase I'd like to have the running of a lightning express. Used to do the former once, but now Fate she says to me, 'You stop right there in Winnipeg, and sell other men's cattle for the best price you can.' Lorimer, I think Number Forty has saved that stock for you."

Then, shivering as the blasts struck the cab, we crouched, alternately frozen and roasted, in the most sheltered corner we could find, while, feeling the pulse of the great quivering machine with a grimy hand, Robertson hurled his engine along past Carberry and the slumbering Portage, until at last, just before the dawn, sheeted white from head-lamp to tank-rail and dripping below, she came pounding into Winnipeg.

"We'll let that slide. I don't like a fuss," said Robertson, when I thanked him. "Glad to do our best for you, Forty and me; and I guess the Company haven't another machine short of the inter-ocean racers that would have brought you in the time."

Then we interviewed the freight-traffic manager.

"That stock consignment came in hours ago," he informed us. "We haven't unloaded them yet. Anyway, you'll have to hurry and see the police, for we're bound to deliver against shipping bill. Don't know how you would square things after that; and it's not my business. Still, I'll have those cars side-tracked where they can't be got at readily."

Next we sought the police, and, after driving half across the city, obtained audience with a magistrate, the result of which was that a detective accompanied us to the station, and then round the hotels, inquiring for the conspirators under several different names. None of them, however, appeared on any hotel register, until we called at a certain

well-known hostelry, where our companion was recognized by the clerk.

"Yes, I guess we've got the men you want," he said, with unusual civility for a Western hotel clerk. "Just stood some big stock-buyers a high-class breakfast, and you'll find them upstairs. Say, if you want assistance send right down for me."

"We'll probably fix them without you," was the smiling answer. "Only two doors to the place, haven't you? I'll leave this man here with you, sending two more to the other one. Walk straight in, Mr. Lorimer, and see the end of the play."

We entered the bustling coffee-room, where, at the detective's suggestion, I ordered refreshment, and he placed us at a table behind two pillars. Heysham ate and chatted in high spirits; but, though hungry enough, I could scarcely eat at all, and sat still in irresolute impatience for what seemed an interminable time. I could not get Minnie's worn face out of my memory; and, though her husband's incarceration would probably be a boon to her, I knew she would not think so. Besides, this deliberate trapping of a man I had met on terms of friendship, even after what had happened, was repugnant; and the cattle were safe. There was, however, nothing to do but wait; for, alert and watchful, the representative of the law — who, nevertheless, made an excellent breakfast — kept his eyes fixed on the door, until I would have risen, but that he restrained me, as, followed by several others, Fletcher and a little dark man, besides the one who had cajoled the stock from me, came in.

"Stock-buyers!" whispered the detective, thrusting me further back. "Go slow. In the interests of justice, I want to see just what they're going to do."

The newcomers seated themselves not far from the other

side of the pillar, and I waited feverishly, catching snatches of somewhat vivid general chatter, until one of the party said more loudly: "Now let us come down to business. I've seen the beasts — had to crawl over the cars to do it — and they're mostly trash, though there are some that would suit me, marked hoop L. & J. Say, come down two dollars a head all around, and I'll give you a demand draft on the bank below for the lot."

What followed I did not hear, but by-and-by a voice broke through the confused murmuring: "It's a deal!" An individual scribbling in his pocket-book moved toward a writing table. Then the detective stepped forward, beckoning to me.

"Sorry to spoil trade, but I've saved your check, gentlemen," he said. "That stock's stolen. Thomas Gorst and other names, Will Stephens, and Thomas Fletcher, would you like to glance at this warrant? No! well, it's no use looking ugly, there are men at either door waiting for you. This is a new trick, Stephens, and you haven't played it neatly."

"Euchred!" gasped the little man, while the other scowled at me.

"Confusion to you! In another hour I'd have been rustling for the Great Republic. Still, I guess the game's up. Don't be a mule, Fletcher; I'm going quietly."

He held out his hands with a resigned air, but when, amid exclamations of wonder, another officer appeared mysteriously from somewhere to slip on the handcuffs, Fletcher hurled a decanter into his face and sprang wildly for the door. He passed within a yard of where I stood. I could have stopped him readily with an outstretched foot or hand, but I did neither, and there was an uproar as he plunged down the stairway with an officer close behind him. The detective saw his other prisoners handcuffed before he fol-

lowed, and though he said nothing he gazed at me reproachfully. When we stood at the head of the stairs he chuckled as he pointed below.

"Your friend hasn't got very far," he said dryly.

It was true enough, for in the hall a stalwart constable sat on the chest of a fallen man who apparently strove to bite him, and I saw that the latter was Thomas Fletcher. I had clearly been guilty of a dereliction of the honest citizen's duty, but for all that I did not like the manner in which he said, "Your friend."

We returned to the station, and later in the day I entertained Robertson and Heysham with the best luncheon I could procure, when for once we drank success to Number Forty in choice vintages.

"I can't sufficiently thank you, Heysham," I said when we shook hands. "Now, advise me about those cattle; and is there anything I can do for you?"

"Enjoyed the fun," was the answer, "and you gave me a free passage to Winnipeg. I didn't do it for that reason, but if you like to leave the disposal of those beasts to Ross & Grant, highest-class salesmen, promptest settlements, etc., I shall be pleased to trade with you. Sorry to intrude business, but after all I'm a drummer, and one must earn one's bread and butter — see?"

I had much pleasure in agreeing, and Ross & Grant sold those beasts to my complete satisfaction and Jasper's as well, while that was but the beginning of a profitable connection with them, and an acquaintance with Heysham, who was from the first a friend of Aline's and is now sole partner in the firm. Still, though I returned to Fairmead with the proceeds, satisfied, it transpired that Thomas Fletcher was not yet past doing me a further injury.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE GOLD TRAIL

NOTHING further of moment happened for a time. Fletcher, protesting his innocence, lay awaiting trial with his accomplices, and I had been warned that I should be called on to give evidence, which I was unwilling to do; and, after consulting a solicitor, I endeavored in the meantime to forget the disagreeable affair. Then one morning, when the snow lay thick on the shingles, and the creek in the ravine was frozen almost to the bottom, the fur-wrapped postman brought me a letter from Harry.

"I have only good news," it ran. "We have piled up beams and stringers ahead of contract, and sold a number of logs a snow-slide brought us at a good profit, ready for floating down to a new sawmill in the valley. That, however, is by the way. As you know, Johnston has quartz reefs on the brain, and now fancies he is really on the track of one. There have been rumors of rich gold west of the Fraser, and one of our prospecting friends came in almost snow-blind with promising specimens. Nothing will stop Johnston, and I'm bitten myself, so the fact is we're going up to find that gold. Of course, it's the wrong time; but there'll be a rush in spite of that. In short, we want you, and I managed to secure this railroad pass."

I showed Aline the letter, and she said, "Why don't you go? I can stay with the Kenyons; they have often asked me. It would be splendid, wouldn't it, if you were to find a gold mine?"

I nodded rather gravely. Gold mines worth developing are singularly hard to find, and when found generally need a large capital to work them, while the company financier gets the pickings. The steady following up of one consistent plan more commended itself to me, and prospecting in mid-winter would try the strength of a giant. Still, if my partners were bent on it they would naturally expect me to humor them in the matter, and there was a hope of seeing Grace, so I answered:

"I wish they had never heard of it; but, if Mrs. Kenyon will take care of you for a few weeks, I must go."

Aline was evidently prepared to bear my absence philosophically, and, perhaps because one of Mrs. Kenyon's sons was a handsome stripling, she spent all day sewing, while I gathered up my belongings and rode over to interview that lady, who had lately come out from Ontario, and professed herself delighted to receive my sister. Thus it happened that one morning before daybreak I stood beside a burdened pack-horse with a load of forty pounds strapped about my shoulders, outside a log shanty, ready to strike out into the snow-bound northern wilderness. Johnston, who was in high spirits, held the bridle of another horse, and Harry whistled gaily as with the assistance of a prospector he strapped a heavy collection of sundries upon its back, while the owner of the shanty watched us with a fine assumption of pity.

"Lots of gold up yonder! Well, I guess there is," he said. "But maybe you'll get mighty tired before you find it, and this isn't quite the season to go sloshing round glaciers and snow-fields. Don't I wish I was coming? Can't say I do. Go slow and steady is my motto, and you'll turn more gold out of the earth with the plough than you ever will with the drill, and considerably easier, too. There's another outfit yonder ahead of you, and a third one

coming along. Look in this way if you come back hungry."

Johnston smote the pack-horse, and there was a clash of rifles, axes, tin pans and kettles as we moved off into the forest, which was free of undergrowth here.

"That was a sensible man," I observed. "Harry, I can't help feeling that this gold hunting is not our business, and no good will come of it."

"Then you needn't say so," Harry answered shortly. "If I were troubled with old women's presentiments I should keep them to myself. The man we have with us knows the country well, and from what the other half revealed we ought to find something. I'm wondering who got up the other expedition, unless it's Ormond. The Day Spring is doing even worse lately, and the Colonel has gone down to Vancouver to raise fresh funds or sell it to a company, which would be rough on the company. Your uncle and your cousin are wintering there."

This gave me food for thought, and I trudged on, dreamily noticing how the tramp of feet and the clatter of metal broke through the ghostly silence, while half-seen figures of man and beast appeared and vanished among the trunks, and the still woods seemed listening to our march. I knew that in the old days the feet of a multitude had worn trails through these ranges as they pressed on toward the treasure of Cassiar and Caribou, and that the bones of many were strewn broadcast across the region into which we were venturing. Perhaps it was because of the old Lancashire folk-lore I once had greedily listened to, but I could not altogether disbelieve in presentiments, and my dislike to the journey deepened until Johnston's voice rose clearly through the frosty air: "There's shining gold in heaps, I'm told, by the banks of Sacramento."

The rest was the usual forecastle gibberish, but, and it may have been that our partner being born with the wan-

derer s spirits could give meaning to the immemorial calling that speaks to the hearts of the English through the rude chanteys of the sea, something stirred me when the refrain rose up exultantly, "Blow, boys, blow, for Californio, for there's shining gold and wealth untold on the sunny Sacramento."

"Where did he learn the trick of it?" said Harry. "There's certainly nothing in the words, and yet that song takes hold. I dare say many a poor deserter devil has marched to his death to it. The seamen came up with the vanguard when they found gold in Caribou. Wake up, and ring it out, Ralph. A tribute to the fallen. 'Hey ho, Sacramento!'"

I have heard that chantey since. On certain occasions Harry brings out its final chords on the Fairmead piano with a triumphant crash that has yet a tremble in it, and each time it conjures up a vision of spectral pines towering through the shadow that veils the earth below, while above the mists the snow lies draped in stainless purity waiting for the dawn. Then I know that Harry, who is only a tiller of the soil, had learned in the book of nature to grasp the message of that scene, and interpret it through the close of a seaman's ballad.

The full story of our journey would take long to tell, and a recital of how we struggled through choked forests, floundered amid the drifts in the passes, or crawled along the icy rock-slope's side, might prove monotonous. We left the ashes of our camp-fires in many a burnt brulée and among the boulders of lonely lakes, but though, after one pack-horse fell over a precipice, provisions ran out rapidly, we failed to find the gorge the prospector talked about; or rather, because the whole land was fissured by them, we found many gorges, but each in succession proved to be the wrong one. Then we held consultations, and the pros-

pector suggested that we should return and try again in the spring, to which Harry agreed. Johnston, however, would not hear of this, and said with a strange assurance:

"I suppose it's the gambler's spirit, but I've gone prospecting somewhat too often before, and if one only keeps on long enough the luck is bound to turn. This time I seem to know it's going to. Still, I'll fall in with the majority. Ralph, as head of the firm you have the casting vote."

Then, and I always regretted it, I said: "We should never have come at all. No sensible person goes prospecting in mid-winter; but, being here, we had better spend three days more. That means further reduced rations, but if we find nothing by the third noon we'll turn back forthwith."

The others agreed, and on the second night we lay in camp in a burnt forest. We were all tired and hungry, and — for Johnston was silent — a melancholy settled down upon the camp, while I lay nearly frozen under two blankets, watching a half-moon sail slowly above the fretted ridge of firs. At last Johnston spoke:

"To-morrow is the fatal day. Ralph has the look of an unsatisfied wolf; you are hungry, Harry; we are all hungry, and such is mortal man that at this moment my soul longs more than all things for even the most cindery flapjack that ever came out of a camp cook's frying-pan. Still, I'm not going home 'returned empty' this time, and fragments of a forgotten verse keep jingling through my head. It's an encouraging stanza, to the effect that, though often one gets weary, the long, long road has a turning, and there's an end at last. It would be particularly nice if it ended up in a quartz reef that paid for the stamping, especially when one might square up some of one's youthful misdeeds with the proceeds. Ever heard me moralizing,

Ralph? The question is whether one can ever square the reckoning of such foolishness."

"I haven't thought about it," I answered, remembering how when Johnston harangued the railroaders' camp, banjo in hand, he would mix up the wildest nonsense with sentiment. "But it's an axiom, isn't it, that a man must pay for his fun, and if you will go looking for gold mines in winter you can't expect to be comfortable."

"He hasn't thought about it," said Johnston. "Ralph, all things considered, you are a lucky individual. What can man want better than to win his way to fortune, and the love of a virtuous maid, tramping behind his oxen under clear sunshine down the half-mile furrow, looking only for the harvest, and sowing hope with the grain. There's a restfulness about it that appeals to me. Some men are born with a chronic desire for rest."

"I don't think you were among them," I answered irritably; "and there's precious little rest in summer on the prairie;" but Johnston continued:

"I too loved a virtuous maiden, and, stranger still, I fancy she loved me, but unfortunately there was one of the other kind too, and the result thereof was as usual — disaster. I've been trying to remedy that disaster — did you ever wonder where my dividends went to? Well, there is a reason why I'm anxious to find a mine. If we do, I'll tell you the sequel. Otherwise — and things do happen unexpectedly — there's a leather case in my pocket, and in case of accident I hope my partners will act on what they find in it. Perhaps some one in England would bless them if they did."

He ceased, and some time later a vibratory monotone commenced far up under the stars, gathering strength and volume until it rolled in long pulsations down the steep ranges' side.

"It's more common in spring," remarked the prospector, "but some ice bridge has busted under pressure, and the snow is coming down. There'll be most astonishing chaos in the next valley."

I cannot say how long the great harmony lasted, for we listened spellbound, unheeding the passage of time, while the cedars trembled about us as the tremendous diapason leaped from peak to peak and the valleys flung back the echoes in majestic antiphones. There was the roar of sliding gravel, the crash of rent-down forest, and the rumble of ice and snow, each mingling its own note, softened by distance, in the supernatural orchestra, until the last echoes died away and there was a breathless hush.

"We have heard great things," said Johnston; "what did the surveyor say? Not an ounce of the ruin is wasted; the lower Fraser wheat-lands are built that way. There's a theme for a master to write a Benedicite. Grinding ice chanting to the thunders of the snow, and the very cedars listening in the valleys. Well, I'll make him a free present of the fancy; we're merely gold miners, or we hope to be. Good-night, and remember the early start to-morrow."

He was up long before the late dawn, and it was still early when we waded scarcely knee-deep among the boulders of a curiously shrunken stream. Smooth-ground rocks cumbered its bed, and the muddy water that gurgled among them was stained red instead of the usual glacial green, while, as I wondered where the rest had gone, the prospector remarked, "These blamed rivers are low in winter, but I never saw one quite so ashamed of itself as this. It's the snow slide we heard last night damming the valley, and there'll be a rush worth seeing when it does break through."

I had occasion afterward to learn that he was right, but meanwhile we followed the banks of the river up-stream, still looking for the gorge. Several times the prospector

fancied that he identified a transverse opening, and then confessed that he was not even sure of the river, because, as he said, there were so everlasting many of them. Johnston grew more and more uneasy, until, when I called a halt as the sun bore south, he looked at me appealingly, and I agreed to continue until there was just time enough left to reach our previous camp by nightfall. So we held on, and finally he turned to me.

"I've played the last game and lost it," he said. "Well, you kept your part of the bargain; I'll keep mine. It's take up the home-trail, boys, we're going back to camp."

He said it lightly, but I could tell that he felt the disappointment bitterly, while even I, who had expected nothing, wheeled the pack-horse around with an angry growl. It was toward dusk when we neared the creek we had crossed in the morning, but it was no longer shrunken. Evidently the dam of débris had given way, for it roared in full flood now, and it was with anxiety that we quickened our pace. The hillsides loomed black out of chilly mist that wrapped the serried ranks of climbing pines in their smoky folds. It was not yet dark in the valley, but the light was dying fast, and a bitter breeze swept down a darkening gorge, bringing with it the moan of an unseen forest until presently this was lost in the voice of the frothing torrent before us. There was neither fuel nor shelter on that side, and we determined to attempt the crossing, for, as Harry said, "Hunger alone is bad, but hunger and cold together are worth an effort to avoid."

The prospector waded in foremost, sounding with a long fir pole. The stream swirled in white wreaths about his waist, and Johnston turned to speak to me, standing a few yards nearer with the ripples at his knee; then I grasped the pack-horse's bridle and forced it into the water. The beast carried a heavy load, including most of our blankets,

and almost the entire balance of our provisions. A rusty rifle was slung behind my shoulders, besides tools and utensils, and Johnston was similarly caparisoned, so I felt my way cautiously as the ice-cold waters frothed higher about me. Near by, the creek poured into the main river, which swept with a great black swirling into the gloom of the forest.

All went well until we gained the center of the stream, and then a loose stone turned under the horse's hoof, or it sank into a deeper hollow, for there was a plunge and a flounder, and, jerked sideways by the bridle, I went down headforemost into the stream. This was a common enough accident, but the bridle slipped from my fingers, and when some seconds later I stood erect, gasping, with the torrent racing past me, the horse was swimming down-stream a dozen yards away, while Johnston struggled in that direction to intercept it.

"Let it go!" I roared. "Water's deepening; you'll be sucked out into the main river," and caught the answer, "All our provisions there!" after which there was a confused shouting, which ended in the warning, "For the Lord's sake, Johnston, look out for yourself!"

I could see that our best chance of rendering assistance would be to cross and try to overtake them from the further bank, and a few seconds later I was clattering over the shingle with the prospector close behind me. But we were already too late. When, waist-deep, I floundered down a shingle spit, the half-submerged beast, handicapped by its burden, swept past out of reach, and I caught a momentary glimpse of a wet white face and a man's uplifted arm before a tumbling ridge splashed up and hid them.

"Couldn't never overtake them, but it's running slacker in the river," the prospector said.

We smashed through a willow thicket which covered a

little promontory, and then, staring wide-eyed under the branches, I saw an indistinct object lurch unevenly into the froth of a rapid, and so pass the next instant out of sight. Whether it was man or horse no one could say.

"He's gone," said the grizzled prospector. "Many another has gone the same way. Find them! Of course, we'll search, but I guess it's hopeless. Don't think your partner was great on swimming, and he was loaded heavy. Come on, daylight's going."

For a moment I felt limp and abject, then in savage fury I broke through barberry branches and thorny brakes, fell into the river, and blundered down a shoaler portion of its channel, until I brought up breathless on the verge of a deep boiling pool, while even as I stared across it the last of the day went out.

"It sounds hard," said the prospector, "but you can't do nothin'. No man could make his way through this bush in the dark, and it wouldn't be any good. Your partner never got so far. We can only say we're sorry, and strike back for camp."

He was right, though I think I cursed him for cowardice then. We struggled on through a horrible chaos of tangled forest, but each time when, peering out between the dark fir branches, I cried aloud, the blackness returned no answer save the boom of angry water. So, bruised, wet, and bleeding, I struggled back toward the fatal creek, and found that my lips would not frame words to answer when Harry said:

"It was horrible, Ralph. I'd give all our hopes and prospects to have the poor fellow safe again. But there's no help for it, and somehow I fancy it was a release. You remember how he looked when he said that this was his last march?"

We lighted a fire, dried our garments and the blankets

that were left us, then Harry flung aside the battered camp spider, and drew out a flask.

"Ten pounds of flour, five of reistit pork — and that's what he gave his life for. No, I don't think I could eat anything to-night. Here, empty half of this, Ralph, you're shaking all over," and Harry lifted his hat as he touched the metal cup with his lips: "Good rest to you, comrade," he said.

I choked over the mouthful of spirits, which I needed badly enough, and then sat shivering wide awake beside the fire through the long bitter night, while when at daybreak I called the others, they both rose with a suspicious readiness. For hours we wandered along the river bank, but found nothing whatever beyond conclusive evidence that even the best swimmer could hardly have come out of that icy flood alive. Then dejectedly we strapped up our traps, and turned our backs on the dismal camp. We halted and looked back a moment on the crest of the divide.

"The beast was badly played out," the guide said, "the man was loaded. Thirty pounds and a rifle — and he couldn't hardly swim. He's gone out on the lonely trail, but whether there's gold at the end of it no living man can say. Maybe you'll find out some day when you follow him."

Then in mournful silence we turned away, and that night we ate our last mouthful in another valley, and forgot the gnawing hunger in broken sleep, through which a wet face persistently haunted me. When we arose there was not even a handful of caked flour in the damp bag, and during a discussion the miner, in reply to Harry's statement, said it did not follow that there were no deer or bear in the country because we had not seen them. Men tramping noisily behind shod horses do not generally chance upon the shy deer, he pointed out; while if two previous hunts

had proved unsuccessful, we might do better on the third. It was at least four days' march to the nearest dwelling, and I agreed with his observation that no starving men could march for four days through such a country. So, to enhance our chances, the company divided, agreeing to meet again, if they killed nothing, at the same spot by sunset.

It was with a heavy heart and my belt drawn tighter that I left the others, carrying a loaded rifle, which seemed to increase considerably in weight. Now, even well north in British Columbia, especially if near the Pacific, there are favored valleys sunk deep among the ranges and open to the west which escape the harder frost, and as this was one of them I determined to search the half-frozen muskegs for bear. The savage grizzly lives high under the ragged peaks, the even fiercer cinnamon haunts the thinly-covered slopes below, but I had no desire to encounter either of them, for the flesh of the little vegetable-feeding black bear is by no means unpalatable, especially to starving men.

So I prowled from swamp to swamp, seeing nothing but the sickly trunks which grew up out of thinly frozen slime, while no sound made by either bird or beast broke the impressive silence of the primeval solitude. At last, when the day was nearly spent, I crawled toward a larger muskeg, which spread out from a running creek, and knelt in congealed mire behind a blighted spruce, listening intently, for a sound I recognized set my heart beating. All around, dwindling in gradations as the soil grew wetter, the firs gave place to willows, and there was mud and ice cake under them. Peering hard into the deepening shadows, I saw what I had expected — a patch of shaggy fur. This was one of the small black bears, and the creature was grubbing like a hog among the decaying weed for the roots of the wild cabbage, which flourishes in such places. Some of these bears hibernate in winter, I believe, but by no

means all, for the bush settlers usually hunt them then for their fur. No summer peltry is worth much.

I was only a fair shot with the rifle, and the strip of black, half seen between the branches, would prove a difficult mark in an uncertain light, while it was probable that three lives might answer for the bear's escape. So I waited, aching in every joint, while my hands grew stiffer on the rifle stock, but still the beast refrained from making a target of itself, until, knowing that it would soon be too dark to shoot, I had to force the crisis. A strange sound might lead the quarry to show himself an instant before taking flight, and so I moistened my blue lips and whistled shrilly. A plump rotund body rose from the weeds, sixty yards away, I guessed, and I pitched up the rifle, dropping my left elbow well over my knee and steadying the cold barrel against the tree.

Sixty yards and a two-foot target, what need for such precautions? one hears the marksmen say, and when stalking sand-hill cranes in warm sunlight now I can agree with them. But I was nearly famished, stiff with cramp and cold, and shooting then for bare existence. With a half-articulate prayer I increased the pressure on the trigger as the fore-bead trembled — it would tremble — across the fur. The bear was clearly suspicious. He would be off the next moment, the trigger was yielding, and with a sudden stiffening of every muscle I added the final pressure as the notch in the rear-sight and the center of the body came for a moment in line. I heard no explosion — one rarely does when watching the result intently — but there was a red flash from the tilting muzzle, and the heel-plate jarred my shoulder. Then I growled with satisfaction as almost simultaneously I heard a sound there was no mistaking, the crunch of a forty-four bullet smashing through flesh and bone. The bear was down, struggling among the weed,

and plunging straight through the muskeg I fell upon it, and, after burning another cartridge with the muzzle against the flesh, I drove the long knife in to the hilt.

Next I rose stiffly upright, ensanguined, with wild gasps of thankfulness, and sent a hoarse cry ringing across the woods, after which I sat down on the fur and stabbed the lifeless brute twice again, for I was filled with a childish fear that even now it might escape me. This was needless, and even barbarous, but to one in my position it was natural.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BRINK OF ETERNITY

A SHOUT came down from the range side, and when the others joined me even Harry surveyed the bear with wolfish eyes, while it did not take long to perform what the French-Canadians call the *éventrer,* and, smeared red all over, we bore the dismembered carcass into camp. We feasted like wild beasts — we were frankly animal then — and it was not until hunger was satisfied that we remembered the empty place. Then we drew closer together, and, though it was mere fancy, the gloom of the forest seemed to thicken round the circle of fading firelight, as Harry said:

"He was the life of the party at either work or feast. Ralph, we shall miss him sorely; a sound sleep to him!"

No one spoke again, and, drawing the two remaining blankets across the three, we sank into our couches of spruce twigs and slept soundly. It was after midnight, by the altitude of the moon, when the prospector roused me, and I sat up with chattering teeth, for there was a bitter wind.

"Don't you hear it? — there — again!" he said.

I was not quite awake, and, when a tramp of footsteps came faintly out of the obscurity, at first I felt only elation. Johnston had escaped and followed our trail, I thought. This was short-lived, and was replaced by superstitious dread, for there could be no human being within leagues of us, and yet the ghostly footsteps drew steadily nearer and nearer. Even the miner, who had spent half his life in the

ranges seemed uneasy, for he stretched out his hand for the rifle, and Harry started upright as a challenge rang through the stillness.

"Stop there, and call out what you want, whoever you are!"

There was no answer from the silence, only the footsteps still approaching, and Harry looked at me curiously when the miner called again.

"Keep back — tell us who you are before we fire on you!"

Then a hoarse voice reached us: "If you have nothing to eat it won't matter much if you do. We are three starving men, and past doing anybody an injury."

"Come forward," I shouted. "We have food here," and three figures staggered into the glow of the fire. The foremost seemed familiar, and I could not repress a start when the red blaze leaped up, for Geoffrey Ormond stood before us leaning heavily on a rifle. His face was thin and furrowed, his coat badly rent, and his very attitude spoke of utter weariness.

"Lorimer, by all that's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "You were not exactly friendly the last time we met. In fact, I almost fancied you wished to ride over me. I hope we're not intruding, but we're most confoundedly hungry."

The last words were unnecessary, for the way the men behind him glanced at the meat showed it plainly enough.

"I must apologize for a fit of temper," I said, holding out my hand, "but it happened near the settlements, and old quarrels don't hold up here. We have food to give you, and we hope that you will consider yourselves welcome."

They certainly did so, for more bear steaks were laid on the embers, and while one of the newcomers, stripping a cartridge, rubbed powder grains into the flesh another produced a few of the fern roots which in times of scarcity

the Siwash Indians eat. When at last they had finished, one of the party, pushing back his fur cap, turned to me.

"You ought to remember me, Lorimer," he said.

"Of course I do, Calvert. Didn't you hire my horses, once?" I replied. "You must take my meaning the right way when I say that I'm pleased to see you here. But what brought you and the others into this desolation?"

Calvert's eyes twinkled. "The same thing that brought you — stories of unlimited treasure. When I heard them I left my few machines — they were not working well, and humbly craved the autocratic president of the Day Spring mine's permission to join this expedition. The Day Spring was not prospering in such a degree that we could afford to ignore the rumors — eh, Geoffrey?"

"You may put it so," said Ormond quietly. "But Colonel Carrington is your acknowledged chief, and you owe him due respect."

"Well," the narrator continued, "we came up, six sanguine men and one despondent mule, which showed its wisdom by breaking its tether and deserting. I gather that these expeditions are generally rough on cattle. Then we lost our way, and, provisions growing scanty, divided the party, three returning and three holding on, Geoffrey and I, unfortunately, among the latter. We got lost worse than ever on the return journey, and were steering south, we hoped, at the last gasp, so to speak, when we found you. That's about all, but, if it's a fair question, did you find any sign of gold?"

"Not a sign," I answered.

"Yours was a triple combination," Ormond said. "Where's your cheerful partner; I liked him. Ah, excuse an unfortunate question — a difference of opinion most probably?"

"No," I answered. "We never had a difference of opinion since poor Johnston joined us. He lies somewhere

in a nameless river — we lost him crossing a treacherous ford two days ago."

Ormond looked startled for a moment, then he bent his head and answered with a kindly glance toward me: "He was a good comrade, and you have my deep sympathy. May I say that sometimes I fancied your friend could tell a painful story, and in endeavoring to forget it made the most of the present."

"You are probably right," said Harry. "He hinted as much, but no one will learn that story now. He took his secret with him, and the river guards it."

"It's an old tale," said Ormond gravely. "The way into this country was opened by the nameless unfortunate. After all, where could a man rest better than among the ranges through which he had found a pathway. Are not these dark pines grander than any monument? Poor Johnston! Lorimer, I wonder, if we knew all, whether we should pity him?"

His face grew somber as he spoke, but it was Ormond who presently dissipated the gloom by a humorous narrative of the doings of the vanished mule, after which we went to sleep again. A pale blink of sunshine shone down when we started south the next day, for we had agreed to march in company, but the weary leagues lengthened indefinitely, and there was still no sign of the eagerly expected trail leading to Macdonald's Crossing, until, when we almost despaired of finding it, one of the party assured us that we should reach it before the second nightfall. During the morning Ormond and I lagged behind the others as we wound with much precaution along the sides of an almost precipitous descent. He limped from some small injury to his foot, made worse by exposure, and as it happened a passing mention of Colonel Carrington stirred up the old bitterness.

Why should this man enjoy so much while I had so

little, I thought. I was handicapped by poverty, and his wealth lay like an impassable barrier between Grace and myself. Then, though I tried hard, I could not drive out the reflection that all would have been different if he had not found our camp. Our partner had gone down in the black pool; we could not save him, but chance had made it easy to succor the one man who could bring me sorrow in his necessity. Then, as I struggled to shake off the feeling of sullen resentment, Ormond perhaps noticed my preoccupation, for he remarked:

"In other circumstances how we should enjoy this prospect, Lorimer!"

We halted a few minutes, and I agreed with him as I glanced about me. A great slope of snow ran upward above us, and as far as eye could see there was a white confusion of glittering ranges. The footprints of our comrades wound in zig-zags among deep drifts and outcrops of ice-touched rock across the foreground, and perhaps twenty feet below the ledge on which we stood a smooth slide of frozen snow dropped steeply toward the edge of a precipice, through a gully in which we could see the tops of the climbing pines far beneath. A few small clumps of bushes and spruce rose out of this snow.

"It's an awkward place for a lame man, but if we wait much longer we will lose the others," said Ormond, pointing to the distant figures struggling across the dazzling incline.

He moved a few steps, then there was a stumble and a sudden cry. I saw him for a moment slipping down the slanted surface of the rock, and when I reached the edge he hung apparently with one foot on a slippery stone, and his left hand clawing wildly at the snow, which yielded under it. I think his other fingers were in a crevice. The fall might not be dangerous in itself, but it seemed impossible

that anybody launched upon that declivity could escape a glissade over the precipice. This struck me in an instant and, grasping a shrub which grew in a crevice, I held out my right hand toward him.

"Get hold, lift yourself with your foot, and I'll drag you up!" I said.

He made a desperate effort, for I could see the veins swell on his forehead, but it was the injured foot which had found hold, and when his chest was level with the edge, still clawing at the treacherous covering, he commenced to slip back again.

"Can't do it. Let go, before I pull you over too!" he gasped.

One reads that in cases of imminent peril men's memories have been quickened and past events rise up before them, but nothing of this kind happened to me, for as far as recollection serves I was conscious only that I could not recover my own balance now, and that there were great beads of sweat on the forehead of the man struggling for his life below who stared up with starting eyes, while my right arm seemed slowly being drawn out of its socket. So I fought for breath, and held on, while I fancy Ormond choked out again: "You fool, let go!" and then, with slow rending, the roots of the shrub gave way, and we plunged downward together.

Ormond was undermost, and he must have struck an uncovered rock heavily, for I heard a thudding shock, and the next moment, driving my heels into the snow, I swept down the incline at a speed which threatened to drive the little sense left in me completely away. Nevertheless, I noticed that Ormond rushed downward head foremost several yards away, and there was a loud crash when he charged through a juniper thicket, and then struck violently against a spruce, which brought him up almost on the verge

of the gully. By good luck I slid into a clump of stout saplings, and presently rose to my knees, blinking about me in a dazed fashion. One thing, however, was evident — any rash move would launch me over the sheer fall. Ormond lay still against the slender trunk, and several minutes passed before he raised his head. There was a red stain on the snow beside him, and his voice was uneven.

"You are not a judicious man, Lorimer," he said. "I'm infinitely obliged to you, but no one would have blamed you for letting go."

"We'll let that pass," I answered shortly. "I'm glad I did not. We are in an awkward place, and the first thing is to decide how to get out of it."

There was a wry smile on Ormond's face when he spoke again: "It's certainly a perilous position, and a somewhat unusual one. You and I — of all men — to be hung up here together on the brink of eternity. Still I, at least, am doubtful whether I'll ever get out again; there's something badly broken inside of me."

The hot blood surged to my forehead, for I understood what he meant, but that was a side issue, and, answering nothing, I scanned the slope for some way of ascent. There was none, and nothing without wings could have gained the valley. Ormond, too, realized this.

"All we can do, Lorimer," he said, "is to wait until our friends assist us. In the meantime you might fire your rifle to suggest that they hurry!"

He spoke very thickly. I scraped the snow from the slung weapon's muzzle, for this will sometimes burst a gun, and then a red flash answered the ringing report from the opposite slope, and presently a cry reached us from the foremost of the clambering figures. "Hold on! We're coming to get you out!" it said.

Now most luckily we had brought several stout hide

ropes with us, which was a rather unusual procedure. The British Columbian mountaineer will carry a flour bag over moraine and glacier trusting only to the creeper spikes on his heels, and in objecting to the extra weight our guide said derisively: "We've quite enough to pack already, and I guess you don't want to dress us up with a green veil, a crooked club with a spike in the end of it, and fathoms of spun hemp, like them tourist fellows bring out to sit in the woods with."

Nevertheless, I insisted, and now we were thankful for the coupled lariats. They could not lower them directly toward me because of a tree, and when the end lay resting on the snow several yards away I braced myself to attempt the risky traverse. The slope was pitched as steeply as the average roof, and there was ice beneath the frost-dried powder that slid along it. Leaving the rifle behind, I drove the long blade of my knife deep down for a hand-hold before the first move.

"Lie flat and wriggle!" called a man above. "Jam the steel into the hard cake beneath!" and with the cold sweat oozing from my hair I proceeded to obey him. How long I took to cover the distance we could not afterward agree, but once I lay prone for minutes together, with both arms buried in the treacherous snow, which was slipping under me, and the end of the lariat a foot or two away. Then with a snake-like wriggle I grasped it, and there was a cry of relief from the watchers. I got a bight around Ormond's shoulders, and after some difficulty fastened it. One cannot use ordinary knots on hide. Ready hands gathered in the slack, and my rival was drawn up swiftly, while they guided him diagonally around instead of under the jutting shelf from which we had fallen.

Then the end came down again, and with it fast about my shoulders I went back for the rifle, after which they

hauled me up, filling my neck and both sleeves with snow in the process. Though Harry laughed, his voice trembled when, as I gained the platform, he exclaimed:

"Well done, partner! You fought gamely, and if you had eaten another bear we should never have landed you."

Harry, I think, had been at one time a trout fisher. Ormond, however, after making an effort to rise, lay limply in the snow.

"I'm very sorry to trouble you, but I can't get up," he said. "Something gone wrong internally and my leg's broken. I'm much afraid you will have to carry me."

It was an arduous undertaking, and even before starting it was necessary to lash his limbs together with a rifle between them by way of splint. After this we spent two hours traversing the next mile or so, and my shoulders ached when with intense satisfaction we found firm earth beneath our feet once more. Ormond was distinctly heavy, and that region is sufficiently difficult to traverse even by a wholly unburdened man, while, hampered by his weight, the two days' march to the crossing might be lengthened indefinitely. Still, we could not leave him there, and, framing two spruce poles with branches between them into a litter, we struggled forward under our burden. We were five partly fed and worn-out men in all, and we carried the litter alternately by twos and fours, finding the task a trying one either way. Probably we could never have accomplished it except under pressure of necessity.

The bronze already had faded in the sufferer's face, his cheeks had fallen in, but though the jolting must have caused him severe pain at times he rarely complained. Instead, he would smile at us encouragingly, or make some pitiful attempt at a jest, and I think it was chiefly to please us that he choked down a few spoonfuls of the very un-

tempting stew we forced on him. Once, too, when I tried to feed him his eyes twinkled, though his lips were blanched, as he said:

"We are playing out our parts in a most unconventional fashion. Ralph Lorimer, are you sure that it is not poison you are giving me?"

Perhaps he would have said more if I had followed his lead, but I did not do so, and these two veiled references were all that passed between us on the subject that most concerned us until almost the end. It was late one night, but there was a beaten trail beneath us and we knew we were running a race for Ormond's life, when at last a glimmer of light appeared among the trunks and the sound of hurrying water increased in volume. We quickened our dragging pace, and when Harry pounded violently on the door of a log building an old man with bent shoulders and long white hair stood before us.

"Ye'll come in, and very welcome," he said. "I heard ye coming down the trail. Four men with a load between them — where are the lave o' ye? The best that's in Hector's shanty is waiting ye."

There was an air of dignity about him which struck me, and I had heard prospectors and surveyors talk about mad Hector of the crossing. When we carried our burden in he knelt and laid back Ormond's under jacket of deerskin before he saw to the broken leg with a dexterity that evinced a knowledge of elementary surgery.

"Is this going to be the end of me?" asked Ormond languidly, and the old man, turning his head, glanced toward me in warning as he answered: "That's as the Lord wills. Yere friends will need to be careful. The leg's no set that ill, but I'm suspecting trouble inside o' ye. With good guidance ye should get over it. Lay him gently yonder while I slip on a better lashing."

He crammed the stove with fuel until the hot pipe trembled to the draught, and soon set a bounteous meal before us — fresh venison and smoked salmon with new bread and dried berries — while he also prepared a broth for Ormond, who drank a little greedily, and then lapsed into slumber. I was for pushing on after a brief rest, but Hector thought differently.

"Neither man nor horse has been drowned while I kept this crossing," he said, "and by the help o' Providence no man will. Can ye no hear the river roaring to the boulders, and would ye have her wash ye out mangled out o' human image into the bottomless pool? Maybe ye'll no like the passage in the light o' dawn, but ye cannot cross till then."

He spoke with a tone of certainty, and knowing that only those who live by them can predict the eccentric rise and fall of these torrents I was glad to defer to his judgment. It was only for Ormond's sake that we desired to press on at all, and Harry observed truthfully, "It wouldn't do the poor fellow any good to drown him."

It was late, but we still loitered about the stove, and when once the old man stood in the open doorway glancing toward the foaming rush of the river that I could see beyond him, as though to gauge its force by the roar which now filled the room, one of the party remarked: "Old Hector's a curious critter, with a kink inside his brain, but there's many a free miner owes a big debt to him. He knows each trick of the river; the Siwash say it talks to him, and when he says clear passage I guess you can cross. I've heard that the Roads and Trails Authorities allow him a few dollars subsidy, but he doesn't stay here for that. He was mixed up in some ugly doings in the gold days, and reckons he's squaring it by keeping the crossing. And I guess he comes pretty near doing it, too, for there's a good

many lives to his credit, if that counts for anything, and I'm figuring it does."

He ceased as our host returned and said, "She's falling half-a-foot an hour, an' for the sake of the sick man I'll see ye over with the break of dawn. Got hurt on the gold trail — ye need not tell me. There's no a sand bar or gully from Fraser till Oominica Hector did not travel thirty years ago. They came up in their thousands then, an' only the wolf an' eagle ken where the maist o' them lie."

"That's true," said the grizzled prospector. "I was in the last of it when Caribou was played out and we struck for the Peace country and Cassiar," and Hector stared past him through the smoke wreaths with vacant eyes that seemed to look far back into bygone years.

"There was red gold to be had for the seeking then," he said. "We won it lightly, an' we spent it ill. Ay wine an' cards, an' riot' when they brought the painted women in, until the innocent blood was spilt, and Hector came down from Quesnelle with the widow's black curse upon him — but it was his partner shot Cassell in the back. The widow's curse; and that's maybe why Mary Macdonal' lies long years her lone among the hills o' Argyle."

"Tell us how you cleaned out the Hydraulic Company, Hector," said the prospector, and added aside to me, "I'm switching him off onto another track. He's not cheerful on this one, and it's hardly fair play to listen while he gives himself away."

Then we heard true stories of the old mad days, tales of grim burlesque and sordid tragedy, which have never been written, and would not be credited if they were, though their faint echoes may still be heard between the Willow River and Ashcroft on the Thompson. Long afterward when Harry and I discussed that experience he said,

"Say little about Hector; one must know these mountains well to understand him. I never saw any one quite like him. He spoke like a Hebrew prophet, and we obeyed him as though he were an emperor."

I slept in a splendid dry blanket under a bearskin which Hector spread over me, and a dim light was in the eastern sky when the old man roused me, saying, "If ye are stout at the paddle we'll try the river noo."

The others were growling drowsily as they rose to their feet, and I saw that Ormond's gaze was fixed on me meaningly.

"You'll take me over now won't you, Lorimer?" he said as I bent over him. "I feel that each hour is precious, and I'm longing above all things to see Miss Carrington before I go. It is for her own sake partly."

I had forgotten our rivalry, and my voice was thick as I promised, while Ormond sighed before he answered faintly:

"It might have been different, Lorimer. It's a pity we didn't know each other better three years ago."

CHAPTER XXV

ORMOND'S LAST JOURNEY

"LAUNCH her down handy. Bring the sick man along!" called some one outside; and when we carried Ormond out I saw the others running a big Siwash canoe down over the shingle, and the dark pines rising spires of solid blackness against the coming day. It was bitterly cold, and white mist hung about them, while huge masses of rock rose through the smoke of the river, whose clamor filled all the hollow. None of us quite liked the task before us, for man's vigor is never at its highest in the chilly dawn; but I remembered Ormond's eagerness to continue the journey. So we laid him gently on our blankets in the waist, and thrust out the long and beautifully modeled craft, which was of the type that the coastwise Siwash use when hunting the fur seals. I knelt grasping the forward paddle until Hector, who held the steering blade, said: "If ye'll follow my bidding I'll land ye safe across. Together! Lift her all!"

The light shell surged forward to the sturdy stroke, for several of those behind me were masters of the paddle, and as I plied my blade I felt with a thrill that it was good to fight the might of the river in such a company. Snowy wreaths boiled high about the shearing prow, I could hear the others catch their breath with a hiss, and once more after a heavy thud the cedar floor seemed to raise itself beneath me and leap to the impulse, while, with a hardening of every muscle, I swept the leaf-shaped blade outward ready for the

dip. There was spray in my eyes, and bearing down on us through it a boulder, with dim trunks opening and closing beyond; then I saw only the bird's head on the prow, for some one cried behind that my stroke was slow, and by the rush of foam and the shock of thudding blow I knew that the others' blades were whirling like flails.

The rock loomed nearer, the river piled against its battered feet, and I hazarded a glance over my shoulder, which showed me a row of set faces turned toward the bow, with stout arms and the flats of redwood blades swung out before them, until with a swing of shoulders the heads went down, and a white wave burst apart before the stem. Looking forward the next instant I saw that the rock lay right athwart our way; but the others had blind confidence in our pilot.

"Back ye on the up-stream; drive her yere hardest, down!" he called.

Then the current strove to wrest my dipped blade away, as with the paddles on one side held fast by sinewy wrists the craft turned as on a pivot, and lurching on the backwash whirled past the stone, after which the cry was: "Drive her all!" and we shot away on the eddy with our faces turned slantwise up-stream. This was well, for close below the whole weight of the current hurled itself in fury upon a ragged barrier, and I understood that Hector had calculated our impetus to a quarter fathom. There was a fight to reach the landing, and with any other than the crew behind me the river might have won; but four of the lean hard men had fought many such battles, and though the trunks raced up-stream we closed with the shore until the shock of the bows on shingle flung me backward.

Our next proceeding was to portage a smaller craft several hundred yards up the river, for Hector to make the return passage, and then, as we thanked him for the food

and the small comforts for Ormond that he forced on us, the old man said:

"Ye're very welcome, an' I'm not wanting yere dollars. Will I take payment for a bit of dried venison, when the Almighty freely gives me all the good fish in the river an' the deer in the woods? Go, an' haste ye; yon man is needing the aid of science."

Then he turned away, and watched us from the shingle as we took up Ormond's litter, and the last that we ever saw of him was a tall lonely figure which vanished into the gray smoke of the river as we plodded up the climbing trail. Still, even now, that lonely figure rises up before me.

"Old Hector tells strange things when the fit takes him. Used to speak our language — it's curious, he talks like some of them emigrants from the old country now," a man beside me said. "But you can stake your last dollar he isn't mad. No, sir, it's quaint he is. I've had my voyageur training in the frozen country under the H. B. C., but when it's dead knowledge of a rapid he'll beat me easy. Some day the river will get him, and then we'll miss him bad."

In due time we reached a shingle-roofed settlement, where a man who had some local reputation for skill in healing horses examined our companion.

"He's pretty well played out," he said. "Ship him straight down to Vancouver in a sleeping-car, and don't you let any of them bush-doctors get their claws on him. I know when a job's too big for me, and this is one. You'll fetch up in time for the Pacific mail if you start now in a wagon."

"What did that fellow say?" asked Ormond, and when I judiciously modified the horse-doctor's verdict he smiled understandingly.

"That's a wise man," he said, "and I can guess what he told you. Lorimer, I know I'm sinking fast, and if you

leave me here I'll die before you can send a doctor up. Probably I'll also die in Vancouver, but every man is justified in making a fight for his life — and there's another reason why I should get there first."

We hired a light wagon, for a passable trail led to the railroad, and perhaps because time was scanty, or the jolting of the wagon was more trying than the swing of the litter, our patient grew worse, and I was thankful at last to see him safe in a berth of the sleeper on the Pacific express. I had grown almost as impatient as Ormond, and I recollect nothing of the journey except that when the lights of Port Moody glittered across the forest-shrouded inlet he said: "Lorimer, I've a stupid prejudice against a hospital. Please take me to Wilson's instead. He lives alone, and I did him several services — you can tell him that it will not be for long."

So when we reached the station Harry volunteered to find the best doctor in the timber city — for hewn stone had only begun to replace sawn lumber then — and arrange for transit to Wilson's house; because he said that it was my particular duty to tell Colonel Carrington and Grace. An hour passed before I traced them, and then I found them at a function given to celebrate the starting of some new public enterprise, and it was with hesitation that, followed by Calvert, I entered the vestibule of the brilliantly lighted hall. We gave a message to a bland Chinese attendant, and waited until returning he beckoned us through a crimson curtain, which swung to behind, and I found myself standing bewildered under a blaze of light in a ball-room.

There was a crash of music, a swishing of colored dresses, and then, as the orchestra ceased, we stood before the astonished assembly just as we had left the bush, in tattered fur wrappings and torn deerskin, with the stains of leagues of travel on our leggings, while I recollect that a creeper-spike

on my heel made holes in the polished marquetry. All eyes were turned toward us.

"This is considerably more than I bargained for," growled Calvert. "I feel guiltily like the man who brought the news to Edinburgh after Flodden. What did you play this confounded trick upon us for, John?"

"John savvy Miss Callington," said the unblushing Mongolian; and Calvert added savagely:

"Then hide us somewhere, and tell her, before I twist your heathen neck for you."

I noticed Martin Lorimer moving toward me; but before he reached us Grace came up, a dazzling vision of beauty.

"I am thankful to see you back safe, Ralph, and hear you have news for me," she said. "Lawrence Calvert, the same applies to you."

It was bravely done, for few women would have cared to link themselves publicly with such a gaunt and tattered scarecrow as I undoubtedly was then; but Grace was born with high courage and a manner which made all she did appear right. When Calvert said that he would send for Colonel Carrington, she calmly placed her hand within my arm, and added:

"We will find quietness yonder in the empty supper-room. You have made me anxious."

Then, doubtless to the wonder of many citizens' daughters and wives, we passed together, a sufficiently striking couple, across the hall; and when at length we escaped the curious eyes, Grace held me back at arm's length.

"You look thin and haggard, Ralph," she said. "Something has happened. Now begin, and tell me clearly all about it."

I did not know how to commence, and I proceeded awkwardly to temporize, though I really meant what I said.

"It was the fault of that stupid Chinaman, Grace, and I

am sorry. It was so courageous of you to come to me before them all."

She looked at me with a curious mingling of pride and humor. "Am I, then, so little as to fear a few inquisitive women? And do you fancy that I loved you for your prepossessing exterior? Now, sir, before you offend me further, at once begin."

I placed a lounge for her, and leaned over it as I said, "It is about Geoffrey. We went up prospecting, and found his party in difficulties. Geoffrey is —"

"Not dead!" she said with a shudder, clutching the arms of the chair. And I laid my hand soothingly on one of hers as I answered:

"No, but he is hurt, and he is longing to see you. He is in Vancouver now. Listen, I will tell you about it."

"Poor Geoffrey!" she said when I had finished, while a tear glistened on her long lashes. "Geoffrey, my old playmate! I can hardly believe it. Ralph, there are very few like him. He is in all things a true-hearted gentleman. He stood between us; but how many others would have played their part so chivalrously when he had the power through my father to force me to his will. And — may I be forgiven for it — more than once I had hard thoughts of him. And now he is dying! Take me at once to see him."

Shortly afterward a voice reached us through an open door. It was Calvert's, saying, "I want you to understand, sir, that if we had not struck Lorimer's camp we should have starved to death. I saw the accident from a distance, and again it's my firm opinion that he ran the utmost risk to extricate Ormond. If the latter were my own brother I should consider myself indebted to him for life."

"I am glad to hear it," answered an unseen person, whom it was easy to recognize as the footsteps drew nearer. "Still, one must take precautions; and, as I observed, in the cir-

cumstances some people might have suspicions. I may say that, indirectly, Lorimer knew that he would profit by my partner's death."

I started, and would have risen, burning with wrath, but Grace's clasp held me fast. The next moment her father and Calvert entered the room. The former glanced toward us in cold surprise; and then, in a hard, ringing tone, Grace said:

"There is still, I hope, a little charity left in the world. The reference is hardly becoming. There are others beside Mr. Lorimer who would benefit, directly, by Geoffrey Ormond's death."

I would have spoken, but she prevented me; and her father stood for a moment speechless with astonishment. Grace was a dutiful daughter, and, though he must have tried her patience hardly now and then, I fancied that this was the first time she had ever openly defied him; while I saw that the shaft had gone home. Colonel Carrington was not, however, to be shaken into any exhibition of feeling, for he turned to me with his usual chilliness:

"I congratulate you on your lucky escape," he said. "Calvert has told me. If you are quite ready, Grace, and will get on your wrappings, we will drive over and visit the sick man immediately."

So, seeing that my presence was by no means desired, I saluted the Colonel with stiffness, and hurried on foot in the direction of Wilson's house. He was a bachelor, it appeared, who dealt in mining gear, and during their business intercourse had made friends with Ormond. Now he was absent inland, but his housekeeper had placed the pretty wooden dwelling at our patient's disposal. What passed between the latter and Colonel Carrington I do not know, but when Grace met me on the stairway as I entered she said:

"He told us how much you had done for him, and made my father believe it even against his will."

Presently the surgeon came down.

"I can do little for him," he said. "There are internal injuries — I needn't describe them — which practically leave no hope of recovery. You can't get a trained woman nurse for love or money, and it rests between yourselves and a Chinaman. I fancy that he would prefer you. I don't know how he stood the journey."

"We did our best, and he was very patient," I said. And the surgeon answered:

"I have no doubt you did, and it speaks well for your comrade's fortitude. You need not blame yourselves, however, for from the first he could not have got better."

"I'll take first watch," said Harry, when, after giving us full instructions, the surgeon departed. "Miss Carrington has already insisted on helping. I've sampled Wilson's wardrobe, but his things would split up if you tried to get into them. Go out and borrow or buy some anywhere. You can't expect to meet Miss Carrington in that most fantastic disarray. I've taken quarters at the Burrard House, and it's not your turn until to-morrow. The Colonel has graciously signified his approval of our arrangements."

When my watch commenced the next day Ormond seemed pleased to see me, and Grace, who was spreading southern flowers in the room, withdrew. Then Calvert and Colonel Carrington came in with a lawyer, and I raised Ormond so that he could see them. Outside, and not far below the window, bright sunlight beat down upon the sparkling inlet, and across it the mountains rose in a giant wall. Ormond glanced at them and sighed. Then he said with slow distinctness:

"Put it down in your own fashion. This is the gist of it: I, Geoffrey Ormond, being now at least perfectly

sound in mind, bequeath my gray horse at Day Spring, all my guns and rifles, with my silver harness and two pedigree hunters at Carrington, to Ralph Lorimer, in token of friendship and gratitude for a courageous attempt at my rescue when by accident I fell from a rock. I especially desire this inserted, Mr. Solicitor. You quite understand what I am saying, Colonel Carrington?"

There was a significant smile in his eyes as they met mine, and something rose in my throat threatening to choke me when he added aside: "You will accept these things as a memento of our last march, I hope? With this exception, I bequeath my property in stocks and lands of all and every kind — I do not enumerate, or appoint other executor — to Colonel Carrington of Carrington Manor, the balance remaining after his death to revert to his daughter Grace. Set it all out in due form, and give me the paper to sign."

Remembering what Grace once told me I fancied that an expression of unutterable relief smoothed out the wrinkles of anxiety on the legatee's brow, but I may have been mistaken in this. There was a curious look in Ormond's face, and I understood the depth of his loyalty to Grace. It struck me with a shock that Ormond, in spite of his apparent carelessness, realized how far matters had drifted, and hoped to spare her the painful discovery. Then he lay back struggling for breath, when, after the will was signed, at a signal from the doctor the others withdrew. Perhaps an hour passed while I kept watch alone before he spoke again, saying very faintly:

"It's strange, Lorimer, that circumstances should constitute you my protector. It's not the usual ending of a very old story. A rich man and a poor man loved the same woman, and — this is where the strangeness happens, perhaps because of all women she was most worthy to be loved — she

looked kindly upon the poorer man. The other had all that fortune could give him save what he most desired, and being older he waited patiently, trusting her heart would turn toward him, and when at last he learned the truth he had not courage to give her up, but waited still, hoping, he hardly knew for what, against hope. Then circumstances held them closer together in a bond that even for her sake he dare not break, until at last the knot was cut. Lorimer, we fought it out fairly, you and I. Now you have won, and I am dying. I only ask you to be good to her."

I turned my head aside, for I could say nothing appropriate, and he added:

"I should like you to keep those rifles, and when some day Grace receives the reversion she will find it but little. We made some heavy losses in joint ventures, her father and I — you will tell her to remember that. I think now all is settled. God bless her!"

He slept or lay quite still for some time, and once more, knowing what I knew, I wondered at the greatness of his nature, for it was evident that, realizing that his love was hopeless, he had stood by her father only to serve her. Then he said feebly:

"Lift me a little, Lorimer, so that I can see the moonrise on the snow. Before another nightfall I shall have followed your partner on the unknown trail."

I raised him on the pillows, and then sat by the window, from which — because the lamp that tired his eyes had been turned very low — I could see the shimmer of stars on the dark breast of the inlet, which was wrapped in shadow, and a broad band of silver radiance grow wider across the heights of snow, until Grace came in softly with more blossoms from sunny Mexico.

Ormond saw her, and he had probably forgotten me, for there was a great longing in his voice as he said huskily:

"Will you kiss me, Grace, for the first and last time since we were innocent children?"

She bent over him a compassionate figure, etherealized by the pale light that touched her through the eastern window, and I went out and waited on the stairway until, after the surgeon went in, she passed me, sobbing, and stilled an expression of sympathy with a lifted hand. That was the last I saw of Geoffrey Ormond in this life, for when next I looked at him he lay very white and still with the seal of death upon him, and I knew that a very clean and chivalrous soul had gone to its resting-place. I touched his cold forehead reverently, and then turned away, mourning him, heaven knows, sincerely, and feeling thankful that when tempted sorely I had kept my promise that day in the bush as I remembered his words, "We have fought it out fairly."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TRIAL

GEOFFREY ORMOND was duly laid to rest in Canadian soil, and it was long before the disastrous expedition was mentioned among us. After all, its painful record was not an unusual one, for even to-day, when wagon roads have been driven into the mountain-walled forests where only the bear and wood-deer roamed before, all who go out on the gold trail do not come home. I was anxious to return to Fairmead, so that as soon as decency permitted I called on Colonel Carrington, and though I longed to challenge what he had said to Calvert, I contented myself with formally renewing my previous request.

He listened with cold patience, but I did not like his very quietness, and, though I believe that he sincerely regretted Ormond's death, I fancied that he was looking more hopeful.

"I am afraid that you are again asking too much, and your request is characterized rather by assurance than by common sense," he said. "I need not recapitulate my former reasons, but, in addition to them, I wonder whether you have read this. As you do not allude to it, you probably have not."

He produced a clipping from a Winnipeg paper, and because Western journalism is conducted in a refreshingly frank style of its own, I read with growing resentment the following paragraph, which, the cutting being still in my possession, is quoted verbatim. It commenced with the head-

ing, "The prosecutor skipped by the light of the moon," and continued: "In connection with the recent arrest of three cattle thieves we have on good authority a romantic story. The case is meanwhile hanging fire and won't go off because of the mysterious absence of the prosecutor, one Lorimer of Fairmead, who has vanished from off the prairie, and will probably not appear again. Circumstances point to his being one of the frolicsome Lotharios who occasionally find the old country sultry, and he apparently developed a tenderness for the wife of one of the prisoners. As a result, there were complications, and she left her home. The husband went to seek her on the wide prairie, and some bad man, after trying to shoot him, threw him into a sloo. We don't know whether this was the prosecutor, but should think so. Then the husband swore vengeance, and it is supposed posted the cattle thieves so that they could clean out the wicked betrayer's stock. Now the lawyers are awaiting their witness, sorrowing, and can't find him, while the boys are saying that if he doesn't reappear the accused will get off."

"That is hardly a desirable certificate of character for my daughter's suitor," said Colonel Carrington.

"Do you believe this infamous libel?" I asked fiercely. And his thin lips curled as he answered:

"Frankly, I do not — that is to say, not the whole of it. But there are others who will; and I can hardly congratulate you on your generally accepted reputation. That alone would be a sufficient barrier to an alliance with my family."

"But you almost made a conditional promise," I said, mastering my wrath. And the Colonel answered lightly:

"I merely said that we would discuss the affair again; and we have done so. Several things have transpired in the meantime, unfortunately for you."

"Then there is nothing but open defiance," I said. "I made you a certain promise in return, and I kept it. But I warn you now that I will marry Miss Carrington in spite of you. As to that clipping, the prosecutor will be found, and if there is a law in Canada a full apology will be printed in the journal. I have nothing more to say."

"You have said sufficient, and I think you are foolish. Any legal action will only make a hole in your scanty exchequer. I wish you good morning," and Colonel Carrington held the door wide open, while, boiling over with fury, I took myself away.

I have often since then pondered over that interview, and could only guess at the reason for the Colonel's evident change of front. I do not think it was due to the paragraph; but if he had some fresh scheme in contemplation we never learned it, and Colonel Carrington is past all explanations now.

When I had partly recovered I showed Harry the paper, and he frowned as he said: "I always anticipated something like this; but of course the present is not the time to tell you so. It rose out of the cattle deal; and you will take whatever steps you think best at our joint expense. In any case, we have only the one purse between us. The sooner you go back the better."

It was good advice, and I proceeded to act on it by telegraphing up the line for a messenger to ride to Harry's camp and send down any letters that might be waiting, after which I sought an interview with Grace. She seemed filled with a wholly unusual bitterness against her father, but made me promise with some reluctance to wait a few months longer before deciding on anything definite.

Harry returned forthwith to his post, but I waited until the mail brought me several letters, reforwarded from Fairmead. One was a request to call on the police authorities,

on a date already passed, in connection with the cattle thieves' trial, and there were two from the Winnipeg solicitor, in the latter of which he said: "I cannot understand your reticence, and must state that your mysterious absence tends to confirm unpleasant rumors about your character. It may also involve you in legal difficulties, and I trust you will at once communicate with me."

I ran to the telegraph office, and, after sending a message, "Expect me by first express," I found Martin Lorimer, to whom I had given an account of my interview with the Colonel, waiting in my quarters. He, too, possessed a copy of the wretched paper, and, flinging it down before me, said, "Hast seen this, lad? A lie, you needn't tell me — it's a black lie. But there's folks that will believe it, for the same story once deceived me. You'll go straight back and sue them. I'm coming too. We'll make them retract it or break them, if there's justice in the land. Alice has gone south to California with a big railroad man's wife, and I'm longing for something to do. There's another matter. Ralph, I've seen the Colonel."

"Seen Colonel Carrington?" I said with dismay. And Martin Lorimer answered dryly:

"Ay, I've seen him, and had a plain talk with him. Nay, I'm not going to tell thee now what I said; but it bit, and he didn't like it. Ralph, lad,"— and he nodded toward me with a chuckle —"his daughter's worth the winning. My own girl says so; and thou shalt have her."

Martin Lorimer was hard to turn aside from any object on which he had set his mind — but so, as everybody knew, was Colonel Carrington — and I fear that I abused him inwardly for a meddling fool, and reflected on the necessity for deliverance from the blunders of well-meaning friends. The harm was done, however; and it was useless to attempt to draw particulars as to his intentions from my uncle, so I

tried to forget the matter. All he would say was, "Wait and thee will see," or, again, with a wise shake of his head in the broad mill parlance, "Thou never knows."

We boarded the next train for Winnipeg, and, after calling on the solicitor and the police authorities, who eventually accepted my explanations, the former accompanied us to the newspaper offices. The chief of the staff seemed surprised when the solicitor introduced me.

"This is Mr. Ralph Lorimer to whom you referred to in a recently published paragraph," he said. "The other gentleman is his uncle, a British capitalist; and after he has given his version of the affair I have something to say. Will you state the main facts briefly, Mr. Lorimer?"

I did so, and the newspaper man — who, I think, was an American by birth — made notes.

Then, before the solicitor could intervene, Martin Lorimer, drawing down his bushy eyebrows, said, in the unaccented English he used when in a deliberately dangerous mood, "You have given out a false impression of an honest man's character. Now you're going to publish a true one, with a full apology, or we intend to make you suffer. There is law in Canada, I suppose; and if it costs me sufficient to buy up three papers, we'll carry the case on until we get our damages or smash you. Understand, I'm for liberty of the press, and in my young days I helped to fight for it; but this is libel; and I think you know my friend yonder."

"I guess I do," said the other. "One of the smartest lawyers in the West. Oh, yes, I know him! See here, we're not great on libel actions in this country. It's mighty hard to get damages for that; and we like our news tasty. No, all things considered, you would make nothing of it if you did sue me. Why,"— and he smiled on the old man, who looked as if he were eager to assault him —"lots of the boys would take that kind of paragraph as a compliment. It

would tickle their vanity. We admit the raciness — we are proud of it; but we stand for fair play too. Would you mind telling me what you expect to do?"

"It doesn't appeal to my client," said the solicitor. "He has, as you would put it, British prejudices. I don't intend to display all our program, but it includes a visit to your rivals and the men who finance you. Still, though you sometimes lay the paint on too thick, I have hitherto found you well-informed and square; and we should rather you did the right thing of your own accord."

The man, I thought, looked honest, and with a shrewd smile he said, "Now you're talking the right talk. This paper casts its egis over the innocent. It's the friend of the oppressed, besides all the other good things set down in the New Year's article. But I shouldn't like those other fellows to get hold of that story before we've done with it. The citizens are interested, and we haven't your superstitious fear of commenting on cases *sub judice*. No, sir, we're afraid of nothing, and don't let British capitalists walk over us with nails in their boots. Now I'm going to make reparation and tell that tale in style, showing up all your client's fine qualities. Want to revise the item? You couldn't do it for ten thousand dollars. We're 'way beyond dictation, and pride ourselves on knowing how our readers like their news."

At a hint from the solicitor I contented myself with a more definite promise to do me justice. Then as we left the office, Martin Lorimer turned to the editor.

"Keep a hand on your imagination," he said grimly, "or you'll see me here again."

"Always glad to meet an interesting Britisher," the man of the pen answered with cheerfulness. "Come in peace, and we'll regale you on our special cigars; otherwise, my assistant will stand by with the politicians' club."

"And that's the creature who libeled us!" said Martin Lorimer when we reached the street. "I've a good mind to go back and show him whether I'm an interesting Britisher — confound him!" whereupon the lawyer laughed heartily.

"They're not all like him," he said. "This particular journal depends on its raciness, and he has to maintain the character. After all, he is an honest man, and he'll do you justice, though the item may contain specimens of what passes for local humor."

This was apparently the case, for when we read it together Martin Lorimer grew very red in the face, and at first I was divided between vexation and amusement. It ran as follows: "We have unwittingly cast suspicion on an innocent man, and for once an unprincipled informant has fooled us. The cattle-thief prosecutor has appeared, and will shortly present himself blushing before the public gaze. We have seen him, and can testify that instead of a Don Juan he is a Joseph, for there is an air of ingenuous innocence about him which makes it certain that he would crawl into a badger-hole if he met a pretty woman on the prairie. If further proof were wanted, he goes about in charge of a highly respectable British Crœsus, one of the full-crusted elderly models of virtue they raise in Lancashire. The class is not obsolete. We have seen one."

Then, with whimsical directness, the following lines set forth the true state of the case, and I felt on the conclusion that the writer had not unskillfully reversed his previous unfavorable version. Martin Lorimer, however, signally failed to appreciate it, for the words obsolete and full-crusted stuck in his throat, and I had some difficulty in restraining him from returning forthwith to the newspaper offices. The journal eventually languished, and succumbed after some friction with the authorities when the editor left it to seek in the great republic a wider field for his talents, but before

this happened he paid us several friendly visits at Fairmead.

The trial, which excited public interest at the time, took place shortly afterward. It transpired that there were other charges of fraud against the pair of thieves, whose case was hopeless from the beginning, but the prosecution experienced some difficulty in obtaining evidence to connect Fletcher definitely with them, though several facts suggested that he had for some time acted as a tool in their hands. The court was crammed, and looking down on the sea of faces I could recognize a number of my neighbors from the Fairmead district and Carrington, and was not overjoyed to see them. An attempt to steal a large draft of cattle was an important event on the prairie. I should not have testified at all, could this have been avoided, which, however, was not the case, and I awaited with much anxiety the cross-examination for the defense, because my solicitor had warned me that as more latitude was generally allowed than in England an attempt would be made to arouse popular sympathy on behalf of Fletcher and shake my evidence by casting doubts on my character.

"Have you any animus against the prisoner Fletcher?" was the first question.

"No," I answered. "Indeed, I was always anxious to befriend him until he robbed and slandered me."

"Or his wife?" added the inquisitor. "I think you knew her in England. Is it not true that you took her from the service of a railroad hotel and found a house for her on the prairie?"

There was a murmur in the court, and objection was taken to this question by the prosecution, but I was directed to answer it, so I said as coolly as I could: "I did know her in England. She was clerk in my uncle's mill, where Thomas Fletcher assisted the cashier. He was not married then. I took her from the service of the railroad hotel."

"It is a damaging admission," said my persecutor, and would have continued before I could finish the answer, but that there was a commotion below, which I hastened to profit by, adding, "But I brought her husband to meet her, and found him a situation in a creamery."

"It is true, every word of it!" a shrill voice rose up, and the murmuring grew louder in the body of the court, while it pleased me to see that the riders of Carrington vied with our humbler neighbors in this sign of approval. Then some one sternly called "Silence!" and the examination commenced again.

"I must protest against friends of the witness coming here to create a disturbance," said the barrister. "They are all owners of cattle, and accordingly filled with prejudice. This is a court of justice, and not a cow-boy's tribunal under the laws of Lynch."

"That is my province," interposed the judge, "and if the disturbance is repeated I shall know how to deal with it."

The barrister bowed as he rearranged his papers, and I felt murderously inclined toward him when, leaning on the rail in an impressive attitude, he continued: "I must next ask the witness whether Mrs. Fletcher did or did not visit him alone at his house, and remain for some time there? Also, when her husband most naturally came to inquire for her, whether he was not threatened with violence, and driven away at the muzzle of a loaded rifle? I want a direct answer. Yes or no."

The prosecution challenged the necessity for such a question, but after some verbal fencing between the lawyers and the judge it was allowed.

"In the first case I was not alone," I said, looking straight at my adversary. "In the second I was absent, and did not threaten him."

"He was to your knowledge threatened?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that shortly after leaving your house he was murderously assaulted as a result of his visit?"

"I believe that some one flung him into a muddy sloo, and I was not sorry to hear it."

"That is sufficient," said the examiner, with a significant smile toward the jury. "He was threatened with a loaded rifle for inquiring as to his wife's whereabouts; then murderously assaulted. Next you work up this charge against him. You may sit down."

I understood that the judge made some comments here, but I was too savage to hear clearly, and scarcely caught what followed next, until Jasper was placed on the witness stand, and stated that he had given no authority to any one except myself to sell the cattle, which he swore to, with other details which were not particularly interesting. There was no doubt that Fletcher was at least obstinately defended, for the lawyer once more strove skillfully to twist out answers confirming the theory that his client had no direct connection with the affair, and sought to show on my part a deliberate intention to ruin him. He may even have believed the romantic story, which was particularly calculated to appeal to a Western jury.

Jasper's replies did not, however, help him much, for when, returning to the subject, he asked, "Did you not on several occasions drive the witness Lorimer over to Fletcher's dwelling with presents for his wife?" Jasper answered boldly, "I did, and I guess Mrs. Fletcher would have gone hungry if we hadn't. Fletcher's a low-grade wastrel, and anyway he ate most of them presents. Yes, sir; they were fowls and potatoes, and Lorimer never went over but Fletcher was there."

There was a great laugh from the riders of Carrington, and the defendant's lawyer frowned.

"Are you a friend of the witness Lorimer?"

"I hope so," Jasper answered simply. "If ever I meet you on the prairie I'll endeavor to convince you."

"Were you a friend of Thomas Fletcher's?"

The answer was emphatic. "No. I guess the sight of the insect makes me sick."

Again the lawyer smiled toward the jury, and the judge, censuring the witness, directed him to refrain from unnecessary details. The next question came:

"Was it because you were a friend of Lorimer's, or had such a bitter dislike to Fletcher, that one night you attempted to murder him? Let me remind you that Fletcher, as has been admitted, came to bring back his wife from Fairmead, and was threatened with a rifle there. Then you rode after him, and overtook him on the prairie where it was lonely."

"It was for neither reason," Jasper answered, straightening his burly form as he glared at his adversary. "A young girl bluffed off Fletcher and the other ruffian there, the prisoner Gorst. She was alone, but she scared the pair of them with an empty rifle. Suppose you left your sister alone, and came back to find a half-drunk hobo trying to murder her?"

The lawyer, I fancied, had now heard rather more than he knew before, and it struck me that the prisoner's cunning had overreached itself in not posting him better, for he glanced at his papers before continuing:

"Did you make a violent attack upon him?"

"I did," said Jasper, cheerfully. "Oh, yes, and I'm coming to it in my own way. I rode right after him, took Fletcher out of the wagon, asked the other man if he felt inclined to assist him, and, when he didn't, laid into Fletcher with the whip and just hove him into the sloo. Why did I do it?—it's a poor conundrum. For the credit of the

prairie. We've no room for woman-beaters, cattle thieves, slanderers, and dishonest lawyers down to our district. Bring along more questions — you hear me; I've lots more to say."

The judge cut short his eloquence, but he had said enough, and there was wild approval from the prairie contingent, in which some of the citizens joined, and through it Jasper towered before the assembly, a stalwart figure, shaking a great fist and ejaculating something in the direction of his annoyer. The tumult was quelled with difficulty, and an official told me that never before had he seen so much excitement shown. It was due, he added, to the presence of those mad young riders of Carrington. I sat down breathing more easily, for I felt that as yet my honor was clear, and whether Fletcher escaped or not was of minor importance. From the beginning the main efforts of the other side had been directed toward saving him, while as the case proceeded I listened with decreasing interest, until at last the prosecutor said:

"My opponent has done his utmost, even overstepping limits, to prove that the witness Lorimer has ended a long course of injury by supporting a false charge against the prisoner Fletcher. This is after all a side issue, but I think the jury will agree that he has furnished most reliable testimony, and that the prisoner mentioned took an unprincipled advantage of his perfectly well-intentioned kindness."

There was considerably more which did not affect me, and another speech, though I woke to eager interest again when the judge, in making his final comments, said:

"As regards the witness Lorimer, I entirely agree with the view taken by the prosecution. He has evidently suffered by well-meant efforts to aid the prisoner, and, though that is not connected with the case except in so far as it covers the reliability of his testimony, he has been shown to be an in-

dividual of unblemished character. We can accordingly accept his evidence."

Again there was applause, which the judge checked severely, and proceeded: "You will notice that, while the prisoner Fletcher's record does not seem to be a creditable one, the evidence fails in some degree to connect him with the other two prisoners as an active participator in the robbery. I refer to —" and so on.

The jury retired for a considerable time, and when the foreman reappeared he announced that they found two of the prisoners guilty, and Thomas Fletcher not guilty, the latter in a very doubtful tone. He also appeared desirous of adding some explanation, which was not permitted; while, as the court broke up, I noticed the detective watching Fletcher much as a cat watches a momentarily liberated mouse. Then I was surrounded by the men from the prairie, who insisted on escorting us to our hotel, and when I asked for Jasper somebody said he had seen him loitering beside one of the court-house doors. We found him partly hidden by a wagon, watching it intently.

"Are you getting up another speech, or trying to freeze there?" one of the Carrington party asked.

"No! I guess I'm laying for that lawyer. Couldn't get at him inside there for a barrier. Am I a low-grade perjurer — and my friend what he was working round to show? If you'll stand by for just two minutes I'll convince the insect — the blamed, vermilion, mosquito!"

"You're too late," said the man from Carrington. "He went out the other way some time ago. Mr. Lorimer, one or two of us were at first — appearances were strongly against you, you know — inclined to doubt you, and we feel considerably ashamed of ourselves. We want you and your worthy uncle to join us at dinner. Got together the best company we could to meet you."

It was honestly said, and we accepted with willingness, while I think my worthy uncle enjoyed himself even more than I did. He was a jealous insular Briton, and the sight of those sturdy handsome young Englishmen who well maintained the credit of the old land in the new delighted him. The appreciation seemed to be mutual. He complained of a headache the next morning; but that dinner had conferred on the Radical cotton-spinner the freedom of aristocratic Carrington, and an indefinite but valuable intimation that the colony had set its special endorsement upon his nephew.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ROAD TO DAKOTA

MARTIN LORIMER returned to Vancouver promptly, for he found the prairie cold trying, and by-and-by I received a letter from Harry still reporting profitable work, in which he said: "Your uncle seems to have developed a craze for real estate. Buying land on a rising town boom is a somewhat risky amusement, especially if, as they express it here, the bottom drops out of the boom; but I suppose he can afford it, and he has been trailing around lately with two surveyors behind him. Laid hands on the timber lots about the Day Spring, which is sending up very low-grade ore. Perhaps you know, though he won't tell any one, why he is doing it."

I showed the letter to Aline, and she looked remarkably wise; then, putting her head on one side, she nodded twice.

"I've a great respect for Uncle Martin's sagacity," she said. "He's planning something for the benefit of Colonel Carrington, and I've a faint inkling of what it may be. But don't worry me with questions. He won't show a single person what he means to do until he is ready."

I had no ideas at all on the subject, though I did not tell Aline so. For her age she was rather too vain of her superior perception, and it struck me as becoming that a younger sister should look up to her brother. I was proud of Aline, but she had her failings.

It was not long afterward, when returning from Jasper's

at night, I found the remains of a meal on the table, and my sister waiting with news for me.

"I'm glad you didn't come home earlier, Ralph," she said. "I am quite ashamed of my inconsistency. It's nice to think oneself inflexible, isn't it? And then it's humiliating to resolve on a certain course and do the opposite."

She paused, either to excite my curiosity or to afford an opportunity for considering the sentiment.

"Never mind all that. Come to the point, Aline," I said. But she stirred the stove, and dusted some plates that did not require it, before she continued:

"I had made up my mind to hate Mrs. Fletcher forever, and, do you know, I let her kiss me scarcely half an hour ago."

"Minnie here again! Oh, confound her!" I said, banging back my chair.

"It's wicked to lose your temper, Ralph," Aline answered sweetly, "and very unbecoming in an elder brother. It isn't poor Minnie's fault that her husband is what you call a bad egg, is it? Yes, she came here in a sleigh with two tired horses, and one was lame. She was going to meet her husband somewhere. He has become a teetotaler, and promises to turn out quite a virtuous character. She hinted at something which I didn't know about that happened at the trial — it was too bad of you to burn those papers — and said he was going to Dakota, across the border. She was almost frozen, had only fall clothes on, and she was very hungry. It wouldn't have been right to let her face an all-night drive in Arctic weather like that, and she put the horses into the stable, while I lent her all my wrappings, gave her food to take, and made her rest and eat. She said she felt she must call and tell me how very sorry she was. Then she cried on my head, and I let her kiss me. We should always be forgiving, Ralph, shouldn't we?"

"Tom Fletcher reformed!" I said astonished. "Oh, how foolish you women are! I've only met one who is always sensible;" and then an idea struck me, and I added quickly: "Are you quite sure Fletcher wasn't in the sleigh?"

"No, Fletcher wasn't there — at least, I'd had neuralgia, so I only looked out of the window. Minnie put up the horses."

Then I flung open a cupboard door, and what I saw confirmed a growing suspicion. For legal reasons whisky is scarce on portions of the prairie, but a timely dose of alcohol has saved many a man's life in the Canadian frost, and we always kept some spirits in case of emergency.

"Then Minnie is not a teetotaler," I said. "A bottle of whisky has gone."

Leaving Aline to consider this, I ran to the stable, and found that one of the splendid horses poor Ormond had bequeathed me was also gone. In its place stood a sorry beast, evidently dead lame, and it did not need the scrap of paper pinned to the manger to explain the visit.

"I am running a heavy risk, and you won't betray me," the pencil scrawl read. "Tetley of Coulée Rouge will send back the horse and robes. It is a last favor; we won't trouble you any more.— Minnie Fletcher."

I was troubled, however. We should need every available beast in the spring, and Tetley was rather more than suspected of being concerned in smuggling whisky and certain contraband commerce, including the shipping of Chinamen over the United States border. It seemed like tempting Providence to leave a horse of that kind in his hands, and yet Coulée Rouge was twenty long miles away. I was also considerably puzzled as to why Minnie should have interfered to save her husband, for it was evident some fresh charge had been brought against him, and he was seeking

safety in the republic. Extradition existed, but except in murder cases it was not often that a fugitive who had once crossed the boundary was ever brought back. It seemed impossible that she had not read the reports in the papers, and the charge Fletcher brought against her was a hard one to forgive. Still, papers were not plentiful on the prairie, and the people she lived with might out of kindness have concealed part of the news from her. However that might be, I determined to save the horse, and explained this to Aline, with a brotherly warning not to allow emotion to get the better of her judgment in future. She listened with a docility that promised future reprisals, and then, agreeing that it would be well to secure the horse, said that she should not mind being left alone. Indeed, unless something very unexpected happened, she would be as safe alone at Fairmead as in any town.

So I saddled the next best horse, donned my warmest skin coat, and started for a cold ride across the prairie. The snow was thin and fairly hard — it seldom lies deep about Fairmead; but in view of the return journey I did not urge the horse, and our sleigh had lost a runner. So when perhaps half the distance had been traversed a beat of hoofs grew louder behind me, and four horsemen, riding hard, came up. By the jingle of accouterments I knew they were the wardens of the prairie, and half expected what was to follow.

"Hold up!" the sharp summons came, while I recognized my old acquaintance, Sergeant Angus, as the speaker. "Lorimer o' Fairmead — good night to ye. Have ye seen a two-horse sleigh? We've news of it passing Green Hollow, south-bound, four hours ago!"

"Whom are you wanting?" I asked.

"Thomas Fletcher," the sergeant answered. "One of his late partners gave him away, and there's a warrant for him.

They wired us on to watch the stations, and a message came from Elktail that he'd been seen heading south in a sleigh. He's no friend o' yours; have ye met that sleigh, and where are ye riding at this unholy hour?"

"No," I said, "I haven't seen the sleigh; but a woman drove up to Fairmead, where my sister was alone, and borrowed my best horse. There are some business friends of yours on the trail to Dakota, and I'm going south in case they took a fancy to it."

"Ye're wise," said Sergeant Angus. "A woman, are ye sure?"

"My sister was sure, and she ought to know."

"I'm not quite understanding this," he said, "but meantime Thomas Fletcher is skipping for the boundary. Ride ye, boys, ride!"

I was thankful for the diversion, for I could not see my way clearly, and as we pressed on there was small opportunity for awkward questions. I wanted the horse and meant to get it, but that would have contented me, and I had no desire to assist in the capture of Fletcher. Another hour passed, and then far away on the edge of the white circle, which was lighted by the rays of a sinking moon, I saw a moving speck, and one of the troopers shouted. Thereupon the spurs went in, and when my beast shot forward I knew that the police horses were tired, and I could readily leave them behind. Still, I was not an officer of the law, and reflecting that my presence or absence would in no way affect the fugitives' chance of escape, while after recent events it was well to be careful, I held him in.

We were gaining, however, for the distant object developed into a sleigh; but the moon was sinking fast, and the dark line on the horizon, with a fretted edge, betokened the birches fringing Coulée Rouge, where the party before us might well escape.

"Ride ye, boys!" cried the sergeant; but the beasts were weary and the blundering gallop was a poor one, while I kept a firm hand on the good horse's rein, holding him behind the others and out of sight, lest Sergeant Angus should demand an exchange in the Queen's name. This was not easy, for Ormond had hunted coyotes on him with a very scratch pack of hounds, while one of the troopers kept dropping back toward me, and the beast seemed under the impression that I was wilfully throwing away my chance in the race. Meanwhile, the sleigh grew more and more visible, though I did not doubt that its occupants were doing their utmost to gain the shelter of the birches in the dark coulée, and that my other horse was suffering at their hands accordingly. Then there was a growl from the sergeant as the sleigh was lost on the edge of the fringe of trees, and presently we rode panting and more slowly beneath them, to the brink of the coulée, with the steam from the horses rising in white clouds about us. It was, of course, particularly steep, and as the moonlight only filtered through the matted branches dark shadow for the most part veiled the treacherous descent, which the troopers accomplished with many a stumble. They were excellent horsemen, but there is a limit to equine endurance, and their beasts had nearly reached it. Presently, as we neared the very rude log bridge which spanned the inevitable creek, the last silvery patch of radiance faded, and thick darkness filled the ravine.

"Halt!" said the sergeant. "Confusion! It's pit dark!" and drawing rein we sat still a few moments, listening intently, but we heard only the branches moaning under the bitter breeze.

"There are two trails," said Sergeant Angus. "Yon one up the other side leads south away for Dakota; this follows the couleé to Jake Tetley's. Tom, ye're proud o' your tracking, ride on to Tetley's, an', for Jake's good at lyin',

look well for the scrape o' runners if he swears he has not seen them. Finding nothing, if ye strike southeast over the rises, ye'll head us off on the Dakota trail. I'm thinking they're hurrying that way for the border, and we'll wait for ye by the Blackfoot ridge."

He rubbed a fizzing sulpher match into sickly flame; but, as the banks were steep, and that bridge formed a favorite crossing, the snow showed the recent passage of many runners, and there was nothing to be learned from them. The wood was thicker than usual, and from what we could see there was no way a sleigh could traverse it quickly except by the two trails. So the trooper departed for Tetley's dwelling, which lay some distance up the coulée, while we breasted the opposite slope and proceeded more slowly through the darkness across the plain. Half an hour later we waited a while on the crest of one of the gradual rises which are common thereabout, until presently a hail answered the sergeant's cry, and the trooper rejoined us.

"They've not been near Tetley's," he said. "Must have pushed on straight ahead of us. I made him bring a lantern, and prospected down the trail, but nothing on four legs has come up it for a week at least."

"Where do you think they have gone?" I asked, and the sergeant answered wearily:

"The deil knows, but it will be south. Weel, we have our orders, an' their cattle are failing, while even if we miss them we'll strike their trail by daylight."

"I hope you will," I answered. "I'm anxious about my horse, but I can't go any further to-night. He's a big chestnut, branded small O inside the Carrington C. You'll be careful with him, won't you?"

"On with ye, boys," said the sergeant. "A fair passage home, Mr. Lorimer; I'm envying ye a warm seat by the stove to-night," and the mounted figures disappeared into

the gloom, while more leisurely I headed back toward the coulée. Orders were orders with the Northwest Police, and though they had ridden under Arctic cold most of the day they must also spend the night in the saddle if the horses could keep their footing much longer, which, however, seemed doubtful. The search might last several days, and I could not leave Aline so long, while a Brandon man of business had arranged to call on me the next afternoon, and I knew that if the troopers came upon it the horse would be in good hands. Still, the police at least were strong men, and I rather pitied Minnie Fletcher slowly freezing in the bitter darkness under Aline's furs. I was glad now that she had lent them to her. Minnie evidently had not expected that the troopers, being warned by telegraph, would take up the trail so soon.

Then for the first time I recollected that Tetley had been cutting building logs on a more level strip half-way up the side of the ravine, and had cleared a jumper trail toward it. The sergeant certainly did not know this, and it struck me that while his party searched the two forking trails Fletcher's sleigh might well have lain hidden in the blind one, and I turned the horse's head toward Tetley's dwelling. When I neared it my suspicions were confirmed, for a rough voice hailed me from under the trees:

"What are you wanting, stranger? Stop there!"

"I want Jim Tetley," I answered.

"He's way down to Dakota, and you can't see him," the unseen person said.

To this I replied at a venture: "I'm too cold for unnecessary fooling. Jim Tetley is inside there. Go right in, and tell him that Lorimer of Fairmead is waiting for his horse. He'll understand that message."

"Now you're talking," said the man showing himself. "Stay where you are until I come back." And when he

returned, he said: "You can have it on the promise you'll tell no one what you see. It's not healthy to break one's bargain, either, with Jim Tetley, while living in a wooden house with a strawpile granary."

"I'm a friend of Mrs. Fletcher, and I'm in a hurry," I answered boldly, and when he ushered me into the dwelling I saw what I had expected. Minnie lay back limp and colorless in a big chair by the stove. Fletcher knelt close beside her chafing her wrists, and the table was littered with wrappings, while Tetley frowned at me from one end of the room.

"Fletcher," I said. "You and your advocate worked up a lying charge against me. Shall I ask your wife before you whether it's true? Do you know that in half an hour I could bring the police on you?"

"I guess you won't," said Tetley, laying his hand significantly on the rifle behind him; while Fletcher answered sullenly, "You needn't. I know now it isn't true. But I was mad, and believed it at first, and afterward it was either that or five years. There were other counts against me; and what could a poor man do?"

Minnie looked at him with disgust, and shivered as she snatched one of her hands from his grasp. "It was very good of your sister, Ralph," she said, "and I knew you would forgive me for borrowing the horse; he is there in the stable, and Tetley will find Tom another. It was an awful journey, even before we reached Fairmead, where I hid him in the bottom of the sleigh; and they brought me in here almost frozen stiff."

"I thought she was gone, poor thing!" said Mrs. Tetley, who was cooking something on the stove; and her husband broke in: "She looked like it. Cuss them police! But we euchred them. A young trooper rides up to the door and drives me round prospecting with a lantern. Of course, he

found nothing, and when he rode off I began to tumble. Found your friends in the log-trail and brought them in, knowing them blame troopers wouldn't come back again. Sergeant Angus is a smart man, but he doesn't know everything, and I'll see Fletcher and his missis safe in the hands of a friend who will slip them over the border."

"I'm not going," said Minnie. "Ralph — and you all can listen — my husband came to me desperate and hopeless in fear of the law. Oh, it's no secret, all the prairie knows that he used me scandalously — but he was my husband — and I could not give him up. So I took the few dollars I had and hired the sleigh, and when the horse fell dead lame we came to Fairmead. I knew, though we had wronged you, I could trust you. Now he's in safe hands; I'm going no further with him. There are some things one cannot forget. I shall tell the story to the people who employed me; they are kind-hearted folk, but it doesn't matter if they give me up. I'm sick of this life, and nothing matters now."

She broke out half-sobbing, half-laughing wildly, and though Fletcher growled something sullenly, hanging his head with the air of a whipped hound, I fancied that he seemed relieved at this decision, and was slightly surprised to see he had even the decency to appear ashamed of himself. Then, knowing that the people she worked for would do their best for Minnie, I determined to write to them, and I asked Tetley to bring out the horse.

"Can't I give you a shakedown in the stable until morning?" he said. "The missis will look after Mrs. Fletcher, and see she gets back safe," and he added so that the others could not hear him, "Fletcher's meaner than poison, and I'd let the troopers have him and welcome, only for the sake of the woman, and because he knows enough about some friends of mine to make things lively if he talked."

Tetley was of course a rascal, but there was a certain

warped honesty in his dealings with brother rogues — at least so rumor said — and I knew if he had given his promise he could be trusted, while a few of his perfectly honest neighbors were sorry when not long afterward Sergeant Angus proved too sharp for him.

"No, thanks," I answered. "My horse would be worth a great deal in Dakota, and I'll clear out while I'm sure of him."

"Good-bye, Ralph," said Minnie, when I donned the fur cap and mittens. "I don't suppose I shall ever see you again — no, of course you won't be sorry; but you and Jasper were the only two who ever showed me kindness in this hard, hard country. I wish, oh, how I wish I had never seen it! Tell my father to forget me, the sooner the better. I have chosen my own way, and must follow it. It's leading me to prison now."

She appeared about to relapse into hysterics, and knowing that I could not help her at the moment, and might only make matters worse, I stopped Fletcher with a threatening gesture as he prepared to address me, and hurried out with Tetley, who showed me the horse.

"You'll strike Cranton's heading, due east by the chain sloos, in a league," he said. "He deals with us sometimes, and you needn't fear his talking. Don't trouble about Mrs. Fletcher. She's all right."

I rode out leading one of the horses, and in due time reached Cranton's, though I nearly beat the door in before I roused him, and I left him the next morning with his curiosity unsatisfied. That was the last I ever saw of Thomas Fletcher. Neither did Sergeant Angus find his trail, for Tetley knew every foot of the prairie, and enjoyed the reputation of being unequaled in his own somewhat mysterious business, which I understood demanded a high proficiency in evading the watchfulness of the police.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RECALL OF ADAM LEE

WHEN I returned to Fairmead I wrote two letters. One was to Minnie's employer, who kept a flourishing implement store further down the line, to which he had lately added a somewhat primitive hotel, in whose management I understood Minnie assisted. He was an enterprising, good-natured Manitoban, and everybody spoke well of his wife, so, having had dealings with him, I requested an interview.

In the other I told Harry all that had passed, asking him to transmit as much as he thought proper to Lee, and then awaited developments. The first result was a note from storekeeper Moran saying that as he was looking up orders for implements he would call on me, which he did presently, and proceeded to discuss the matter with frankness.

"My wife has taken a fancy to Mrs. Fletcher," he said. "We just call her Minnie because there's no particular reason to handicap her with her husband's name. She's a mighty smart honest woman, and we knew that story about you was a lie from the beginning — did our best to keep it from her, but I think she knew. We were startled some when she lit out with the sleigh, but she came back half-dead, and we asked no questions until she told us. She's been sick and fretful since, but I guess there's nothing you can do. When we can't keep a sick woman who has done good work for us a while we'll give up the business. She'll be pert again directly."

"You are a very kind man," said Aline, glancing at him critically.

"Thank you, miss," Moran answered. "You just make your mind easy about Mrs. Fletcher; and now, Lorimer, we'll talk business. You'll want a new binder if you're putting in much of a crop, and I've got the latest machines coming in from Toronto."

Aline burst into a hearty laugh, in which I joined her, for the speech was characteristic of the native prairie inhabitants' character. Frugal, but open-handed, hard to beat at a bargain, they are equally swift to seize upon all chances that lead to business and do the stranger an unostentatious kindness, though they have no false delicacy in forthwith establishing commercial relations with the man they benefit.

"Don't see any joke!" said Moran. "You want a binder. I've seen the old one, and I've got lots to sell. Of course we'll look after Mrs. Fletcher, but that's no reason I should miss a deal."

The result was that I ordered an expensive binder which I had hoped to do without, and presently Moran departed with the order in his pocket.

"I think he was very sensible," said Aline, "and you know you said the old machine would hardly have lasted."

Harry answered promptly, and said he expected I should see Lee very soon. He had been restless ever since he heard of Fletcher's blacksliding, and had, among other things, embarked upon two unpopular crusades. He even seemed disappointed, Harry added, because there was so little drunkenness and loose living for him to grapple with.

"That is so like a man," said Aline when she read the letter. "Where is your boasted consistency? He ought to be thankful. But you have missed the postscript about Uncle Martin. This is what Harry says: 'I met him in long boots one day when I went up to see Calvert, trailing a survey chain not far from the Day Spring mine, and when

I asked him what he was doing it for, and whether snow-slush was good for lumbago, he smiled and answered in the silver tongue of your native country something I failed to comprehend. For a respectable cotton-spinner, as I told him, he has developed curious ways.'

"You will see by-and-by, and so will that arrogant Colonel," said Aline. "He has offended him bitterly, and I shouldn't like to be an enemy of Uncle Martin's."

There was an interlude of quietness, and then, when at last the winter showed signs of relaxing its iron grip, and the snow grew soft at noon, events commenced to follow fast upon one another. Jasper drove up from the railroad one afternoon bringing Lee with him, and then departed with, I thought, undue precipitancy, leaving myself and the old man alone, for I had increased the accommodation at Fairmead, and Aline discreetly withdrew. He had of course read the papers, though not until some time after the trial, and was good enough to say he never doubted my innocence. Still, I had to repeat all the unpleasant details, until at last Aline returned to prepare supper.

Then he sighed as he said: "It's a bad business, but I feared from the start this would be the end of it. And now I'm going to tell thee something. I've served thee and thy partner as well as I could, and I've saved some money doing it. It's a gradely life up yonder, in spite of the snow and cold — ay, I would ask no better than to end my days there, but it's over easy and peaceful in a world that's brimming with misery, and I've been feeling like Jonah when he fled with his message."

Aline smiled at me over her shoulder, and I stared at him in amaze, saying, "I never found it either particularly easy or peaceful. I don't quite understand you."

"No," said Lee, changing in a moment to his old pedantic style I had almost forgotten. "Thou hast not

the message; it's thy work to till the soil, and I had thought to bide in this good land helping thee until my time came. But a voice kept on saying, 'Go back to them hopeless poor and drunkards thou left in Lancashire.' I would not listen. The devil whispered I was worn out and done, but when I talked with Harry, he, not having understanding, said: 'You're looking younger every day. If I heard those kind of things I should say it was liver.' "

Aline no longer smiled, but sat watching him and listening gravely, and I began to catch a glimmer of his meaning.

"The folks at chapel had not forgotten me," continued Lee, "and they were in trouble. There was another man took up the work I left, but he went off with t' brass they'd gathered for a new gallery, and they wrote they'd see I got back the old shop if I come home again. And because I was weak and fearful o' the grinding struggle over there, I did not go. They wrote another letter, but still I bided, until I read this paper."

He spread out a soiled English journal, and, running a crooked finger across it, read out the headings, with extracts, at some of which, remembering Aline's presence, I frowned. It was only a plain record of what happens in the crowded cities of the older land — a murder, two suicides, and the inevitable destitution and drunkenness, but he looked up with kindling eyes.

"I could not shut my ears. The call was, 'come an' help us,' an' I'm going. Going back out of the sunshine into the slums o' Lancashire."

This, I reflected, was the man who had once attempted my life — igorant, intolerant, and filled with prejudice, but at least faithful to the light within him; and I knew that even if he failed signally, the aim he set before himself was a great one. No suitable answer, however, suggested

itself, and I was thankful when Aline said, "It is a very fine thing to do. But what about your daughter?"

"Her place was by her husband," said Lee; "but her husband left her. Minnie is going back with me. Your brother will take me to see her to-morrow."

I did so, at the risk of overtaxing the horses by a trying journey through softening snow; but I sent a telegram to Minnie, and when we left the cars she was there to meet us, looking weak and ill, with shadows in the hollows round her eyes.

"It was very good of you to come, father," she said. "I was an undutiful daughter, and I suffered for it. Now I have broken the law, and the police troopers could take me to prison. But I am tired of it all, father, and if you will have me I am going home with you."

"Thou'rt my own lass," said Lee; and I found something required my presence elsewhere, for Minnie was shaken by emotion as she clung to him. And yet this tearful woman had outwitted the tireless wardens of the prairie, and, in spite of the law's vigilance and deadly cold, smuggled her faithless husband safe across the border.

We stayed at Moran's Hotel that night, and Mrs. Moran acted with unusual good-nature, in the circumstances, for she not only suffered Minnie to leave her at the commencement of the busy season, but bestowed many small presents upon her, and it was with difficulty that I avoided giving her husband an order for sufficient implements to till the whole of the Fairmead district.

"Now that you're here you had better make sure of a bargain while you have a chance," he said. "Say, as a matter of friendship I'll put them in at five per cent. under your best offer from Winnipeg."

Though I wished them both good fortune, satisfaction

was largely mingled with my regret when the next day I stood in the little station looking after the train which bore Lee and his daughter back to his self-imposed task in smoky Stoney Clough. Neither of them ever crossed my path again; but still Harry and I discuss the old man's doings, and Aline says that there was a trace of the hero hidden under his most unheroic exterior.

Not long after this Calvert called on us, and spent two days at Fairmead before he went east again. He explained his visit as follows: "The Day Spring will have to get on as best it can without my services. The fact is, I can't stand its owner any longer. I was never very fond of him — no one is, but I liked poor Ormond, and stayed for his sake. So, informing the Colonel that he could henceforward run the mine himself, I pulled out hoping to get a railroad appointment in Winnipeg. By the way, there is trouble brewing between him and your uncle."

Aline nodded toward me meaningly, and Calvert continued:

"Our tunnel leads out beside one boundary of the Day Spring claim. I must explain that of late we found signs that, in spite of a fault, the best of the reef stretched under adjoining soil, and it was only owing to disagreements with his men, and my refusal, that the Colonel neglected to jump the record of a poor fellow who couldn't put in the legal improvements. He had intended to do so; while I believe the miner, who fell sick, told your uncle. This will make clear a good deal; you should remember it. Well, to work our adit we had to make an ore and dirt dump on adjacent land; and we'd hardly started it than two men began felling timber right across our skidway, until, speaking as if he commanded the universe, the Colonel ordered them off. They didn't go, however; and I really thought he would have a fit when one of them said with a grin,

'Light out of this, and be quick. Don't you know you're trespassing?'

"Colonel Carrington turned his back on them, and bade us run out the trolley along the wooden way; and I did so, against my judgment, for one of the men looked ugly, and my master wasn't exactly a favorite. The other fellow was busy with the axe, and when he gave me a warning to get out I proceeded to act upon it — which was fortunate, for a big hemlock came down on the trolley, and all that was left of it wasn't worth picking up. Colonel Carrington doesn't usually give himself away, but he swore vividly, and I went with him the next day into the timber city. It's getting a big place already. He stalked into the land agent's office with a patronizing air, and then said with his usual frigidity:

"'Who owns the timber lots about the Day Spring? I'm going to buy them.'

"'You can't do it,' said the agent. 'My client won't sell, and wants to give you warning that he doesn't like trespassing.'

"'That means he wants a big price,' said the Colonel, looking at the map. 'What's his figure?'

"And the agent grinned as he answered, 'For the piece you require for the ore-dump, ten thousand dollars.'

"'He is mad,' said the Colonel, 'perfectly stark mad. Tell him I shall dump my refuse on it, if I have to finance somebody to locate a mineral claim. What is the name of this lunatic?'

"'Martin Lorimer,' said the agent. 'The crown in that case gives you the minerals; but before you put a pick into the ground you must meet all demands for compensation — and they'll be mighty heavy ones. My client is also prepared to collect them by the best legal assistance that money can buy, and I guess you've given him a useful hint.'

"My respected chief just walked out; but I think he was troubled at the name," said Calvert. "And after that there was some fresh difficulty every week, while his temper, which was never a good one, got perfectly awful, until I came away. He'll go off in a fit of apoplexy or paralytic seizure when his passion breaks loose some day."

Calvert furnished other particulars before he resumed his eastward journey, leaving me with much to ponder. An actively worked mine is a public benefit, and its owners usually have free access and privilege upon the adjacent soil; but I knew that in such matters as cutting timber, water, and ore and refuse heaps a hostile neighbor could harass them considerably. "Uncle Martin is going to enjoy himself," said Aline, when I told her so.

It was some weeks later when Harry and his assistants came home, bringing with him a heavy bank draft and a wallet stuffed with dollar bills. He looked more handsome and winning than ever when he greeted Aline, and — though it needed some experience of her ways to come to this conclusion — I could tell that she regarded him with approval. He had finished the railroad work, and when he had furnished full details about it, he showed that he had thoughtfully considered other matters, for he said:

"Ralph, I guessed you would be busy altering Fairmead on opportunity, and now that your sister has turned it into a palace I should always be afraid of spoiling something; so I have arranged by mail to camp with Hudson, of the next preemption. His place is scarcely a mile away. Miss Lorimer, you don't realize the joys of living as a bachelor, or you would freely forgive me."

"I think I do," said Aline. "Half-cooked food on plates that have not been washed for weeks and weeks, and a house like a pig-stye. Have I not seen my brother

reveling in them? Mr. Harry Lorraine, from what Ralph has told me, there is no one I should more gladly welcome to Fairmead than its part-owner, and I am surprised that he should prefer the pig-stye. Still, in reference to the latter, is there not a warning about blindly casting?"

"There is," laughed Harry. "I crave mercy. In token of submission I will help you to wash those dishes now." And, being perfectly satisfied to be for once relieved of the duty, I lounged in the ox-hide chair watching them through the blue tobacco smoke, and noting what a well-matched couple they were. An hour had sufficed to make them good friends; and I was quite aware that Harry had entered into the arrangement merely for our own sake, Hudson, as everybody knew, being neither an over-cleanly nor companionable person.

When the last plate had been duly polished and placed in the rack that Aline had insisted on my making, Harry spread out a bundle of papers.

"Now we will settle down to discuss the spring campaign, if your sister will excuse us," he said.

"Aline is already longing to show me how to run a farm. Go on, and beware how you lay any weak points open to her criticism," I answered.

"In the first place, there is the inevitable decision to make between two courses," said Harry; "the little-venture-little-win method or the running of heavy risks for a heavy prize. Personally I favor the latter, which we have adopted before, and, which I think you have already decided on."

"I have," I said.

"Then we will take it as settled that we put every possible acre under crop this spring, hiring assistance largely,

which, based on your own figures, should leave us this balance. It's a pity to work poor Ormond's splendid beasts at the plough, but of course you wouldn't like to sell them, and they must earn their keep. The next question is the disposal of the balance."

"I would not sell them for any price," I said. "My idea is to invest all the balance — except enough to purchase seed and feed us during winter if the crop fails — in cattle, buying a new mower, and hiring again to cut hay. It's locked-up money, but the profit should provide a handsome interest, and there's talk of a new creamery at Carrington, which promises a good market for milk. This brings us back to the old familiar position. We shall be prosperous men if all goes well, with just enough to pay our debts if it doesn't."

"I look for the former," said Harry. "But with your permission we'll deduct this much for a building fund — half to be employed at the discretion of either. You will want to further extend this dwelling, and I may buy Hudson's place under mortgage. It would be well-sunk money, for at the worst we could get it back if we sold the property. You agree? Then the whole affair is settled, and it only remains for Miss Lorimer to wish us prosperity."

"You are a very considerate partner, Mr. Lorraine, and if I were a wheat-grower I should be proud to trust you. May all and every success attend your efforts. Now put up those papers, and tell me about British Columbia."

It was very late when Harry walked back to Hudson's, while I did not sleep all night, thinking over the tremendous difference that success or failure would make to myself and Grace.

CHAPTER XXIX

CONCERNING THE DAY SPRING MINE

IT was a perfect day when we commenced the ploughing, and we hailed it as a favorable augury that cloudless sunshine flooded the steaming prairie. Glittering snow still filled the hollows here and there, but already the flowers lifted their buds above the whitened sod, and the air vibrated to the beat of tired wings as the wild fowl returned like heralds of summer on their northward journey. We had three hired men to help us, in addition to the teams driven by myself and Harry; but, and this was his own fancy, it was Aline who commenced the work.

"You will remember our hopes and fears the day we first put in the share. Many things have happened since," he said, "but once more the harvest means a great deal to both of us. Miss Lorimer — and we are now more fortunate, Ralph, than we were then — you will imagine yourself an ancient priestess, and bless the soil for us. That always struck me as an appropriate custom."

The wind had freshened the roses in Aline's cheeks, and her eyes sparkled as she patted the brawny oxen. Then she grasped the plough-stilts, and, calling to the beasts, Harry strode beside her, with his brown hand laid close beside her white one. Theirs was the better furrow, for, tramping behind my own team not far away, I could hardly keep my eyes off the pair. Both had grown very dear to me, and they were worth the watching — the handsome strong man, and the eager bright-faced girl, whose merry

laugh mingled with the soft sound of clods parting beneath the share. They stopped at the end of the furrow, and I wondered when Aline said with strange gentleness: "God bless the good soil, and give the seed increase, that we may use the same for Thy glory, the relief of those that are needy, and our own comfort."

"Amen!" said Harry, bending his uncovered head, as, a sinewy, graceful figure in dusty canvas, with the white sod behind him, he helped her across a raw strip of steaming clod, while neither of us spoke again until we had completed another furrow. It was a glorious spring, and not for long years had there been such a seed time, the men who helped us said, while my hopes rose with every fresh acre we drilled with the good grain. I was sowing the best that was within me as well as the best hard wheat, and it seemed that the rest of my life depended on the result of it. There is no need to tell how we labored among the black clods of the breaking, or the dust that followed the harrows, under the cool of morning or the mid-day sun, for we were young and strong, fighting for our own hand, with a great reward before at least one of us. Still, at times I remembered Lee, who was in his own way fighting a harder battle against drunkenness and misery, the reward of which was only hardship and poverty. Once I said so to Aline, and she answered me: "It was his vocation; he could not help it. Yours, and I do not think you could help it either — you would have made a remarkably poor preacher, Ralph — is to break new wheat-lands out of the wilderness; for, you will remember — well, I'm not a preacher either, but not wholly for Grace or yourself."

Women, I have since learned, not infrequently see, perhaps by instinct, deeper into primal causes than men, and there was more in her words than perhaps she realized, for

though the immediate impulse may be trifling or unworthy, it is destiny that has set the task before us, and in spite of the doer's shortcomings it is for the good of many that all thorough work stands. Many a reckless English scrapegrace has driven the big breaker through new Canadian land because he dare not await the result of his folly at home, but nevertheless, if he ploughed well, has helped to fill the hungry in the land he left behind.

It was during the sowing that Aline showed me a paragraph in a Victoria paper which said, among its mining news: "We hear that the Day Spring will probably close down pending negotiations for sale. For some time there has been friction with the owner of the neighboring property, who has also located a mineral claim, and, it is said, has exacted large sums for compensation. We understand there are indications of fair payable ore, but further capital is needed to get at it. We do not desire to emulate some newspapers in sensational stories, but there is a tale of a hard fight for this mine between two Englishmen, one of whom championed the cause of an oppressed colonist."

"It seems cruel," said Aline. "I am afraid Uncle Martin is very revengeful, and I wish he had not done so much. However, from what I hear, Colonel Carrington almost deserves it, and he has evidently treated Uncle Martin badly. I suppose you have not heard what caused the quarrel?"

"No," I answered, "and in all probability no one ever will. It is, however, an old one, and they only renewed it in Canada. Uncle Martin says little about his injuries, but he doesn't forget them."

This was but the beginning, for we had news of further developments shortly, when Calvert paid us a second visit.

"I'm going home to England for a holiday," he said.

"Secured a very indifferent post in Winnipeg, and was delighted to hear of another mining opening in British Columbia. Now, you'll be surprised, too. It was to enter your uncle's service. I met him about the Day Spring sometimes, and he apparently took rather a fancy to me, while on my part I didn't dislike him."

"Martin Lorimer turned mine-owner! This is news," I said, and Calvert laughed.

"Yes, and of the Day Spring, too; I'm to manage it in his interest. Now you see the method in his madness. It appears that the Colonel had pretty well come to the end of his tether — he is by no means as well off as he used to be — and in his customary lordly way he told a financial agent to get from any one whatever he could over a fixed limit. It was, as a matter of necessity, a low limit. I warned Mr. Lorimer that though there was a prospect of fair milling ore we had found very little so far, but he's a remarkably keen old fellow, and had been talking to the miners, especially the unfortunate one who had been holding out against the Colonel's attempts to squeeze him off his claim. Mr. Lorimer agreed with him to let it lapse and re-record it. So I went with him and his agent to sign the agreement, and felt half-ashamed when Colonel Carrington came in. Of course, I had no need to. He always treated me with a contemptuous indifference that was galling, and a man must earn his bread. Still, I had taken his pay, and it hurt me to see him beaten down upon his knees.

"He came near starting when he saw your uncle, but made no sign of recognition, as, turning to his broker, he asked in his usual haughty way, 'Will you tell me what this man's business is?'

"'Mr. Lorimer takes over the Day Spring,' said the agent, and I fancy the ruler of Carrington swore softly between his teeth, after which he said: 'You told me it was

Smithson you were negotiating with. Is there any means whatever by which I can annul the bargain?'

"'Smithson bid beneath your limit, and then bought it acting as broker for Mr. Lorimer,' was the answer. 'I have applied for a record of conveyance, and the sale was made by your orders. It cannot be canceled now without the consent of the purchaser, and a new record.'

"The two men looked at each other, your uncle drawing down his thick eyebrows, which is a trick he has, and the Colonel gnawed his lip. If it had happened in the early gold days there would have been pistol shots. Then my new employer said, 'I will not sell,' and Colonel Carrington flecked off a speck of dust with his gloves.

"'You have bought it for less than a fourth of what I spent on the property,' he said very coolly, 'but if the mine yields as it has done hitherto I cannot congratulate you,' and he stalked out of the room. He was hard hit, but he went down the stairway as unconcernedly as if he had not come to the end of a fortune, while the new owner said nothing as he looked after him. That's about all, except that the Colonel goes back to Carrington, and my worthy employer to Mexico. He told me he had word your cousin was not well there. I wonder, Ralph, how this matter will affect you. Your relations with Miss Carrington are of course not altogether a secret."

I did not enlighten him. In fact, I hardly cared to ask myself the question, for I could not see how the fact that he had lost a considerable portion of his property could increase the Colonel's good-will toward me. Nevertheless, if the difference in worldly possessions constituted one of the main obstacles, as he had said it did, there had been a partial leveling, and if we were favored with a bounteous harvest there might be a further adjustment. I should not have chosen the former method; indeed, I regretted it, but

it was not my fault that he had quarreled with Martin Lorimer, who had beaten him in a mining deal. The latter could be hard and vindictive, but there was after all a depth of headstrong good-nature in him which was signally wanting in the cold-blooded Colonel. I disliked him bitterly, but now I almost pitied him.

"Do you think there is any ore worth milling in the Day Spring, Calvert?" I asked presently.

"Frankly, I do. It will cost further money to bring it up, but now that I have a free hand and unstinted material I am even sanguine. We start in earnest in two months or so, and then we will see — what we shall see."

Calvert left us the next day, and it was a long time before I saw any more of him. The next news that I had was that Grace and Miss Carrington had returned to Carrington. I rode over to see them, and found a smaller number of teams plowing than there should have been, while even Miss Carrington, who received me without any token of displeasure, seemed unusually grave, and several things confirmed the impression that there was a shadow upon the Manor. I could ask no questions, and it was Grace who explained matters as I stood under the veranda holding the bridle of Ormond's hunter.

"It's a strange world, Ralph," she said in a tone of sadness. "Rupert, as you will notice, knows me well, and I never thought that one time you would ride him. Poor Geoffrey! I cannot forget him. And now your uncle owns the mine my father hoped so much from. The star of Fairmead is in the ascendent and that of Carrington grows dim."

"All that belongs to Fairmead lies at your feet," I said. "I value its prosperity only for your sake," and she sighed as she answered:

"I know, but it is hard to see troubles gathering round

one's own people, though I am glad the mine has gone. It was that and other such ventures that have clouded the brightness there used to be in Carrington. Still, Ralph," and here she looked at me fixedly, "I am a daughter of the house, and if I knew that you had played any part in the events which have brought disaster upon it I should never again speak to you."

I could well believe her, for she had inherited a portion of her father's spirit, and I knew the ring in her voice, but I placed one arm round her shoulder as I answered: "You could hardly expect me to like him, but I have never done him or any man a wilful injury, and until the sale was completed I knew nothing about it. But now, sweetheart, how much longer must we wait and wait? Before the wheat is yellow Fairmead will be ready for its mistress, and with a good harvest we need not fear the future."

"You must trust me still Ralph," she said wearily. "I am troubled, and often long for the wisdom to decide rightly what I ought to do, but when I feel I can do so I will come. Twice my father and I had words at Vancouver, and sometimes I blame myself bitterly for what I said. Wait still until the harvest; perhaps the difficulties may vanish then. Meanwhile, because I am Grace Carrington, and he would not receive you if he were here, you must come no more to the Manor while my father is away. Besides, each hour is precious in spring, and now you must spend it well for me."

I had perforce to agree. Grace was always far above the petty duplicity which even some excellent women delight in, and she added gently: "Some day you will be glad, Ralph, that we acted in all things openly; but a fortnight to-morrow I intend riding to Lone Hollow, from which I return at noon. Then, as a reward of virtue, you may meet me."

It was with buoyant spirits that I rode homeward under the starlight across the wide, dim plain, for the cool air stirred my blood, and the great stillness seemed filled with possibilities. The uncertainty had vanished, the time was drawing in, and something whispered that before another winter draped white the prairie Grace would redeem her promise. Counted days as a rule pass slowly, but that fortnight fled, for there was little opportunity to think of anything but the work in hand in the hurry of the spring campaign, and one night Raymond Lyle, of Lone Hollow, and another of the Carrington colonists spent an hour with us. Since Aline honored Fairmead with her presence we had frequent visits from the younger among them. Aline was generally piquant, and these visitors, who, even if a few were rather feather-brained, were for the most part honest young Englishmen, seemed to find much pleasure in her company. Lyle, however, was a somewhat silent and thoughtful man, for whom I had a great liking, and he had come to discuss business.

"Listen to me, Lorimer, while I talk at length for once," he said. "A few of the older among us have been considering things lately, and it doesn't please us to recognize that while nearly every outsider can make money, or at least earn a living on the prairie, farming costs most of us an uncertain sum yearly. We are by no means all millionaires, and our idea is not to make this colony a pleasure ground for the remittance-man. We have the brains, the muscle, and some command of money; we were born of landowning stock; and we don't like to be beaten easily by the raw mechanic, the laborer, or even the dismissed clerk. Still, while these farm at a profit we farm at a loss."

"I belong to the latter class," I said; "and here are a few reasons. We are plowing and grain-hauling while you shoot prairie-chicken or follow the coyote hounds. We work

late and early, eat supper in dusty garments, and then go on again; while you take your hand at nap after a formal dinner, and — excuse me — you look on farming as an amusement, while the land demands the best that any man can give it — brain and body. Besides, you are lacking in what one might call commercial enterprise."

"I agree with you," said Lyle, "especially the latter. Anyway, we have had almost sufficient of farming as a luxury, and mean to make it pay. Colonel Carrington's ideal of an exclusive semi-feudal Utopia is very pretty, but I fear it will have to go. Now I'm coming to the point. You and Jasper have shown us the way to make something out of buying young Western stock; but we're going one better. Breeding beef is only one item. What about the dairy? We couldn't well drink up all the milk, even if we liked it; and we have definitely decided on a Carrington creamery, with a Winnipeg agency for our cheese and butter."

"Bravo!" said Harry. "Ralph, that should pay handsomely. Only one rival in all this district! I see big chances in it."

Then Raymond chuckled as he continued: "Specifications have been got out for a wooden building, a location chosen, and, in short, we want you two to cut the timber and undertake the erection. We want a man we know, Lorimer, whom we can discuss things with in a friendly way. It can't be ready this summer, and you can take your own time doing it. The rest say they should prefer you to an outsider; and your railroad building is a sufficient guarantee."

I lighted my pipe very deliberately, to gain time to think. Neither Harry nor I was a mechanic; but in the Western Dominion the man without money must turn his hand to many trades, and we had learned a good deal,

railroad building. Neither need it interfere too much with the farming, for we could hire assistants, even if we brought them from Ontario; and here was another opening to increase our revenue.

"Subject to approved terms, we'll take it — eh, Harry? — on the one condition that Colonel Carrington does not specifically object to me," I said. "Where is the site?"

"Green Mountain," answered Raymond Lyle. "As to terms, look over the papers and send in an estimate. Payments, two-thirds cash, interim and on completion, and the balance in shares at your option. Several leading business men in Brandon and Winnipeg have applied for stock."

"Green Mountain!" broke in Harry. "That's the Colonel's private property and pet preserve. Coyote, even timber wolves, antelope and other deer haunt it, don't they? He will never give you permission to plant a creamery there. Besides, I hardly fancy that any part of the scheme will commend itself to him."

Lyle looked thoughtful. "I anticipate trouble with him," he said. "Indeed, the trouble has commenced already. But, with all due respect to Colonel Carrington, we intend to have the creamery. He came home yesterday, and rides over to see Willmot about it to-morrow."

When he had gone Harry laughed with evident enjoyment of something.

"The fat will be in the fire with a vengeance now," he said, "I didn't give them credit for having so much sense. It's one thing to speculate and run gold mines that don't pay in British Columbia, but quite another to turn one's pet and most exclusive territory into 'a condemned, dividend-earning, low-caste, industrial settlement, by Gad, sir!' Cut down the Green Mountain bluff, smoke out beast and bird, plant a workman's colony down in Carrington! Turn the ideal Utopia into a common, ordinary creamery! — and

you will notice they mean to make it pay. The sun would stand still sooner than the Colonel consent."

I was inclined to agree with Harry, but I also felt that if it were impossible to lessen Colonel Carrington's opposition to myself there was no use making further sacrifices hopelessly. Even his own people had shown signs of revolt, and Grace's long patience appeared exhausted. There are limits beyond which respectful obedience degenerates into weakness, and the ruler of Carrington had reached them.

I met Grace at the time appointed, and her look of concern increased when I mentioned the creamery.

"I am afraid it will lead to strife, and I am sorry that you are connected with it," she said. "My father, though I do not altogether agree with him, has a very strong objection to the project, while even his best friends appear determined upon it. It may even mean the breaking up of the Carrington colony. Since the last check at Vancouver he has been subject to fits of suppressed excitement, and my aunt dare scarcely approach him. Ralph, from every side disaster seems closing in upon us, and I almost fear to think what the end will be. It is my one comfort to know that you are near me and faithful."

Her eyes were hazy as she looked past me across the prairie. Starry flowers spangled the sod, the grass was flushed with emerald, while the tender green of a willow copse formed a background for her lissom figure as she leaned forward to stroke the neck of the big gray horse, which pawed at the elastic turf. There was bright sunshine above us, dimming even the sweep of azure, and a glorious rush of breeze. All spoke of life and courage, and I strove to cheer her, until a horseman swept into sight across a rise, and my teeth closed together when I recognized the ruler of Carrington. He rode at a gallop, and his course would lead him well clear of where we stood, while

by drawing back a few yards the willows would have hidden us. But I was in no mood to avoid him, even had Grace been so inclined, which was not the case; and so we waited until, turning, he came on at a breakneck pace. The black horse was gray with dust and lather when he reined him in, spattering the spume flakes upon me. After a stiff salutation, I looked at the Colonel steadily.

"You are an obstinate and very ill-advised young man, Lorimer of Fairmead," he said, making an evident effort to restrain his fury — at which I took courage, for it was his cold malevolence that I disliked most. "Grace, you shall hear now once and for all what I tell him. Lorimer, you shall never marry Miss Carrington with my consent."

It may not have been judicious, but I was seldom successful in choosing words, and expected nothing but his strongest opposition, so I answered stoutly, "I trust that you will even yet grant it, sir. If not — and Miss Carrington is of age — we must endeavor to do without it."

He turned from me, striking the impatient horse, and when the beast stood fast, he fixed his eyes on his daughter.

"Have you lost your reason as well as all sense of duty, Grace?" he stormed. "What is this beggarly farmer, the nephew of my bitterest enemy, that you should give up so much for him? Have you counted the cost — hardship, degrading drudgery, and your father's displeasure? And would you choose these instead of your natural position as mistress of Carrington?"

"While I have strength to work for her she shall suffer none of them," I said. But neither, apparently, heeded me, and, rapidly growing fiercer, the old man added:

"There will be no half-measures — you must make the choice. As that man's wife you will never enter the doors of the Manor. Remember who you are, girl, and shake off this foolishness."

His mood changed in an instant. Colonel Carrington was clearly not himself that day, for there was an almost pleading tone in the concluding words, and he awaited her answer in a state of tense anxiety, while I could see that Grace was trembling.

"It is too late, father. The choice is already made," she said. "There are worse things than poverty, and if it comes we can bear it together. We hope you will still yield your consent, even though we wait long for it, and had you asked anything but this I should have done it. Now I have given my promise — and I do not wish to break it."

Her voice was strained and uneven, and with a thrill of pride, leaning sideways from the saddle, I caught her horse's bridle as by right of ownership. However, in spite of his enmity, I was sorry for Colonel Carrington. It must have been a trying moment, for he loved his daughter, but wounded pride gained the mastery, and his face grew livid. I made some protestation that we both regretted his displeasure, and that Grace should want nothing which I could give her, but again he utterly ignored me, and, wrenching on the curb, backed the horse a few paces. Then, and I shall never forget the bitterness of his tone, he said:

"First those fools in British Columbia, then the men I settled in Carrington, and now my child to turn against me in my adversity. You have made your choice, girl, and you will rue it. I will humble you all before I die."

He caught at his breath, his face twitched, and his left hand sank to his side, but he wheeled the black horse with his right and left us without another word, while Grace sat looking after him with a white face and tears in her eyes.

"I cannot tell you what this has cost me, Ralph," she said. "No, you must not say anything just now. Give me time to think; I can hardly bear it."

We did not resume our journey immediately, and when we passed the next rise Colonel Carrington was far off on the prairie.

"We will wait until harvest," Grace said, in reply to my questions. "There will, I fear, be changes by then."

Half an hour later we rode into sight of Carrington, and both instinctively drew rein; then Grace signified approval as without speaking we rode on again. Still her faint smile showed that she recognized my own feeling that we were riding boldly into the camp of the enemy. Miss Carrington met us at the entrance, and when I dismounted said to me aside:

"My brother came in a little while since in an angry mood. I fancy he must have met you, and will not ask injudicious questions; but, to please me, you will go. He has been broken in health lately, and any further excitement is to be avoided just now."

I took my leave accordingly, for as far as she could do so without offending her brother Miss Carrington sympathized with us, and as I rode back to Fairmead I could not forget the Colonel's curious manner when he concluded the interview. I also recollected how Calvert had said: "That man will end with a stroke, or in a fit, when he lets his passion master him some day."

CHAPTER XXX

CARRINGTON ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY

A WEEK or two passed, and then when riding to Lone Hollow on business connected with the creamery scheme I chanced upon Jasper. I had seen very little of him since Harry returned, and taxed him with it, saying: "Have we frightened you away from Fairmead lately?"

"No," he answered, with some confusion. "I guess there's no place in the Dominion where I should sooner go."

"Well, then, why don't you come?" I asked; and the big man hesitated still, inspecting his boots, until, facing round toward me, he said: "I've been figuring it mightn't be good for me. I'm a plain man with a liking for straight talk, Ralph — so are you — and it might make things easier if I were to tell you. It's Miss Aline that scared me."

I burst out laughing, but Jasper did not join; then I waited somewhat astonished until he continued: "She's the flower of this prairie, and she's got a mighty cute head of her own. I never could stand them foolish women. So I came, and I would have come every day, until Harry chipped in, and that set me thinking. I said, 'You stop there and consider, Jasper, before it's too late, and you're done for.'"

I frowned at this, but Jasper added: "You don't get hold exactly — what I meant was this: I'm a big rough farmer, knowing the ways of wheat and the prairie, and knowing nothing else. She's wise, and good, and pretty, way up as high as the blue heaven above me. Even if she'd

take me — which, being wise, she wouldn't — the deal wouldn't be fair to her. No; it couldn't anyway be fair to her. Then I saw Harry with his clever talk and pretty ways, and I said, 'That's the kind of man that must mate with her. Go home to your plowing, Jasper, before it becomes harder, and you make a most interesting fool of yourself.' So I went home, and I'm going to stop there, Ralph Lorimer, until the right man comes along. Then — well, I'll wish Miss Aline the happiness I could never have given her."

"You are a very good fellow, Jasper," I said, and pitied my old friend as he departed ruefully. He had acted generously, and though I hardly fancy Aline would have accepted him, in any case, I knew that she might have chosen worse. There are qualities which count for more than the graces of polish and education, especially in new lands, but Harry possessed these equally, and, as Jasper had said, Aline and he had much more in common. Then it also occurred to me that there was some excuse for Colonel Carrington. The cases were almost parallel, and to use my friend's simile Grace Carrington was also as high as the blue heavens above her accepted lover. Still, if I had not the Ontario man's power of self-abnegation, and had forgotten what was due to her, she had said with her own lips that she could be happy with me, and I blessed her for it.

What transpired at Lone Hollow also provided food for thought. Lyle and several of the supporters of the creamery scheme awaited me there.

"We have practically decided to accept your estimates," Lyle said, "but it seems advisable to make one or two alterations, and we want you to ride over with us to Green Mountain to-morrow and make a survey of a fresh site that one of the others seems to think favorable. After we decide on a place for the buildings, and a few other details, we'll

ask you to attend a meeting which we expect to hold at the Manor. The matter will have to be discussed with Colonel Carrington."

"Then I should sooner you excuse me. I'm afraid that my presence might prejudice the Colonel," I replied, and several of the others laughed.

"He's prejudiced already," said one. "Still, we are growing rather tired of the Colonel's opposition to whatever he does not suggest himself, and we mean to build the creamery. You will have to face your share of the unpleasantness with the rest of us."

I almost regretted that I had furnished the estimates, but it was too late and I could not very well draw back now; so, promising to attend, I returned to Fairmead in a thoughtful mood. Aline bantered me about my absent-mindedness, and desired to learn the cause of it, but as Harry was there and it partly concerned Jasper's explanation I did not enlighten her. Strange to say, I had never pictured Harry as a suitor for my sister, but now I could see only advantages in the union for both of them, and, what was perhaps as much to the purpose, advantages for me. I expected to bring Grace to Fairmead sooner or later, and she and Aline were, I felt, too much alike in one or two respects to agree.

On the following day I rode over to Green Mountain with Lyle and three or four of his friends. We had a measuring chain with us as well as one or two instruments that I had learned how to use when railroad building, and it was afternoon when we got to work plotting out the alternative site for the creamery that one of the others had considered more favorable on account of its convenience to running water. The term Mountain is used somewhat vaguely on the prairie, and Green Mountain could scarcely be called a hill. It was a plateau of no great height dotted with

a dense growth of birches and seamed by ravines out of one of which a creek that would supply the creamery with power came swirling.

We alighted on the birch bluff that stretched out some distance into the prairie from the foot of the plateau, and spent an hour or so before we decided that the new site was more favorable than the other. Then Lyle turned to me.

"Hadn't we better run our line through and mark it off now that we're here?" he suggested.

I agreed, and as one of the men had brought two or three saws and axes in a wagon we set about it. The men from Carrington, however, were not very proficient at the work and a good deal of the chopping fell to me. The bush was rather thick, and I spent an hour in tolerably arduous labor before our base line was clear. Then I sat down on a slender fallen birch while Lyle and the rest went back to the wagon for some provisions they had brought. It was evident that we could not get home for supper.

It was a still afternoon, and the sound of the creek rang across the shadowy birches with an almost startling distinctness. That end of the line had, however, nearly reached the verge of the prairie. Presently another sound that rapidly grew louder reached my ears. It was the rhythmic beat of approaching hoofs, and for no very definite reason it brought me a trace of uneasiness. However, I sat still with my pipe in my hand until the drumming of hoofs that grew very close stopped suddenly, and then turning sharply I saw Colonel Carrington striding through the bush. He stopped near my side, and nobody would have supposed from his appearance that the sight of me or the fallen trees afforded him any pleasure.

Three or four slender birches lay close at my feet, and here and there another was stretched across the line I had driven. Carrington's face grew hard, and a little por-

tentous sparkle crept into his eyes as he looked at them. Then he turned to me.

"Mr. Lorimer," he said, "will you be kind enough to explain why you are cutting my timber without permission?"

"I have done it at Mr. Lyle's request, sir," I said.

Now I do not know how Carrington had heard of what was going on, but his answer made it evident that he had.

"Ah, I had partly expected this. Will you tell Lyle that I want him at once!"

It was not a request but a command flung at me with a curt incisiveness that brought the blood to my face, and I was never quite sure afterward why I went. Still, it was usually difficult for even those who disliked him most to disobey Colonel Carrington. In any case, I found Lyle and the others, and came back with them outside the bluff which was the easier way. Carrington, however, had evidently grown impatient, and I saw Lyle's lips set tight when he and three or four of the younger men who I heard afterward were rather indebted to the Colonel rode out from the shadow of the bluff. One of my companions smiled expressively, but nothing was said until Carrington drew bridle a few yards away. He sat impassively still with one hand on his hip and a handful of young lads behind him, and there was silence for a few moments while the two parties looked at each other. It was not exactly my quarrel, but I could feel the tension.

Lyle stood close beside me quietly resolute, but one or two of his comrades looked half-ashamed and as though they wished themselves anywhere else, while the lads who rode with Carrington were manifestly uneasy. Still, the grim, erect figure sitting almost statuesque on the splendid horse dominated the picture. At length Carrington indicated me with a glance which, though I was ashamed of the fact afterward, made me wince.

"This man tells me that it is by your authority he is cutting down my timber," he said.

"He is quite correct in that, sir," answered Lyle.

"Ah," said Carrington, and his voice was very sharp, "you did not consider it necessary to ask my sanction?"

Lyle looked at his companions, and it was evident that they realized that the time for decisive action had come. The Colonel clearly meant to assert his authority, and I fancied that he would not hesitate to overstep it if this appeared advisable. He had, however, ridden them on the curb too long, and his followers' patience was almost at an end. Still, it requires a good deal of courage suddenly to fling off a yoke to which one has grown accustomed, and I sometimes think that if Carrington had been a trifle less imperious and Lyle had not stood fast then his companions once more would have deferred to their ruler and the revolt would never have been made. Perhaps Lyle recognized this for his answer seemed intended to force the matter to an issue.

"We were afraid it would be withheld, sir," he said.

Carrington understood him, for I saw the blood creep into his face. "So you decided to dispense with it?"

"I should have preferred to put it another way, but it amounts to that," said Lyle, and there was a murmur of concurrence from the rest which showed that their blood was up.

"Then you may understand that it is refused once for all," said Carrington. "I will not have another birch felled on Green Mountain. Now that you know my views there is an end of it."

He was wrong in this. The end which I think must have proved very different from what he could have expected had not yet come. He had taken the wrong way, for those whom he addressed were like himself mettlesome Englishmen of the ruling caste, and while they had long paid him

due respect they were not to be trampled on. They stood fast, and losing his temper he turned to them in a sudden outbreak of fury.

"Why don't you go?" he thundered, and pointed to the saws and axes. "Take those — things along with you."

None of them moved except Lyle who stepped forward a pace or two.

"There is a little more to be said, sir. You have refused your sanction, but bearing in mind a clause or two in the charter of the settlement I'm not quite sure it's necessary. In one sense Green Mountain is not exactly yours."

"Not mine!" and Carrington stared at him in incredulous astonishment. Then he seemed to recover himself and smiled in an unpleasant fashion. "Ah," he said, "you have been reading the charter, but there are several points that evidently you have missed. For one thing, it vests practically complete authority in me, and my decision as to any changes or the disposal of any of the Carrington land can only be questioned by a three-fourths majority of a general assembly. I have not heard that you have submitted the matter to such a meeting."

"I have not done so, sir," answered Lyle.

There was, I thought, still a faint chance of a compromise, but Carrington flung it away.

"Then," he said, "I choose to exert my authority, and I think that I have already told you to leave Green Mountain."

Lyle apparently recognized that the Colonel had the best of it on what one might call a point of law, but the way the latter used the word "told" would, I think, have stirred most men to resistance. It was far more expressive than if he had said commanded. Lyle stood quite still a moment or two looking at the Colonel with wrinkled brows.

"If you will listen to me for a few minutes, sir," he said at length.

"No!" interrupted Carrington. "It would be a waste of time. You know my views. There is nothing more to be said."

Then he committed the crowning act of folly as tightening his grasp on his bridle he turned to the lads behind him.

"Drive them off!" he said.

The half-contemptuous command was almost insufferably galling. Carrington might have been dealing with mutinous dusky troopers instead of free Englishmen who farmed their own land, and the lads who had at first appeared disposed to side with him hesitated. He swung around in the saddle and looked at them.

"Must I speak twice?" he asked.

He turned again raising the heavy riding crop he carried, and I expected to see the big horse driven straight at Lyle, but one of the lads seized his leader's bridle just in time.

"Hold on, sir," he cried, and then while the big horse plunged he flung a few words at my companion.

"Don't be a fool, Raymond. Get out of this — now!" he cried.

Lyle's face was darkly flushed, and it appeared to cost him an effort to hold himself in hand.

"We're going, sir," he said. "Loose his bridle, Charley."

The lad did as he was bidden, and Lyle motioned us to withdraw, after which he once more addressed Carrington.

"You have refused us permission to touch this timber, and I suppose we must yield to your wishes in this respect," he said. "I'm afraid it's more than likely, too, that you will object to our putting up the buildings we have in mind anywhere about Carrington?"

"Your surmises are perfectly correct," replied the Colonel.

"Well," said Lyle, "according to the charter we can overrule your objections by a three-fourths majority, and I have to give you notice that I'm going to call a meeting on Thursday next to consider the matter. We have generally met at the Manor to discuss anything of interest."

Carrington who appeared to have recovered his composure raised his hand in sign of dismissal.

"Any time you wish in the evening — say six o'clock," he said.

We turned away and left him, but it seemed to me from his manner that he would not have agreed to the meeting so readily had he not been certain that it would cost him very little trouble to humiliate the men who called it. Lyle appeared very thoughtful as we rode away.

"I'm sorry all this has happened, but it was bound to come," he said to one of his companions. "I may not have been particularly tactful, but, after all, unless I'd given way altogether I don't see that I could have handled the matter in any very different way."

The man who rode beside him laughed somewhat ruefully. "No," he admitted, "you simply can't discuss a point with the Colonel. I'm rather afraid the thing's going to hurt a good many of us, and it may result in breaking up the settlement, but the fat's in the fire now, and we must stand fast." He broke off for a moment with a sigh. "If he only weren't so sickeningly obstinate! It's an abominably unpleasant situation."

I could understand how the speaker shrank from the task in front of him. For years he and the others had rendered their leader unquestioning obedience, and the Colonel hitherto had ruled the settlement more or less in accordance with their wishes, though I fancy that this was due to the

fact that their views had generally coincided and not to any willingness to defer to them. It was, perhaps, not unnatural that most of them should look coldly on innovations and hold by traditions, for Englishmen are proverbially averse to change. Still, they could recognize when a change was absolutely necessary, and setting aside their predilections and prejudices insist on it. I, however, had less of the latter, since my status was not theirs, and it seemed to me that the man who would be most hurt was Colonel Carrington.

There was no doubt that he had the gift of command. Some men are unmistakably endued with it, and as a rule everybody defers to them even when they do not use it wisely. They come to regard it as their right, and by presuming on the good-nature or supineness of those with whom they come into contact, until at length the exception to the rule appears. Then being boldly faced they prove to be very much like other men. The air of authority disappears, and everybody wonders why he allowed himself to be overawed so long.

Still, I sympathized with Lyle who rode slackly, as it were, gazing straight in front of him with thoughtful eyes. There was no doubt that what he meant to do was repugnant to him, especially as the Colonel was a distant kinsman of his. He was a quiet, honest, good-humored Englishman, but men of that kind now and then prove very grim adversaries when they are pushed too hard, and they stand for what they consider the interest of their fellows. Nothing further was said until we reached the spot where the trail to Fairmead branched off, and then Lyle turned to me.

"I'll expect you at the Manor on Thursday," he said.

Then they rode on to Carrington, and I turned off toward Fairmead.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DEPOSED RULER

THE day of the meeting was never forgotten at Carrington, and distorted rumors of what had happened there traveled far across the prairie. One Mennonite settler compared it to the downfall of King Herod, but among Carrington's own people there were none who referred to the events of that evening without reluctance and regret.

It was a glorious afternoon when I set out, and the prairie was fresh and green after a gentle rain that promised an early sprouting of the seed, but as I neared the Manor the faces of those I met were anxious and somber. They looked like men who after mature consideration had undertaken an unpleasant duty, and I could not help a fancy that some of them wished themselves well out of it. Saddled horses, buggies, and wagons stood in front of the house, and further mounted figures were approaching across the prairie, but the men who had already arrived seemed more inclined to wait for them than to enter the building, until its owner stood in the doorway. He looked at them with a little grim smile.

"It is not the first time you have been here, and this difference appears a little unusual," he said. "Won't you come in?"

I went in with the others, and was not pleased when Lyle placed me beside himself in a prominent position. Indeed, after a desultory conversation during which no one seemed quite at ease it was a relief to hear the last arrivals

dismount and then to take our places at the long table upon which Lyle had deposited plans of the settlement. He with a few others of what was evidently the executive committee sat near me, and the rest stretched back toward the doorway. As we waited a few moments in a state of tense expectation the details of the scene impressed themselves on my memory.

There were heads and skins, as well as Eastern weapons — trophies the Colonel had brought home from several of England's smaller wars — on the cedar wainscot. The prairie was flooded with sunlight outside, and an invigorating breeze that flowed in through the open windows brought with it the smell of the grass and stirred the heavy curtains. Carrington sat at the head of the table in a great oak chair which Grace once told me had come from a house that was famous in English history. There was an escutcheon which some of the settlers derided on the paneling above it, and the sunlight beating in through a window fell on him. He sat very erect, a lean, commanding figure with expressionless face and drooping white moustache, close to the great English pattern hearth which in winter assisted the much more useful stove, while both his manner and the surroundings suggested some scene in the feudal ages rather than an incident on the newly-opened prairie.

"You asked me to meet you, and, as far as I can see, every man in Carrington is here," he said. "Raymond Lyle, you called this meeting. We are waiting for what you have to say."

Lyle was not an orator, but he was filled with his subject, and the men listened to him that day. First he supplied them with details respecting the projected creamery, and then straightening himself a little he turned his quiet, honest eyes upon his host.

"We desire to have your approval, sir, but we clearly recognize the necessity for more attention to the commercial

side of the question if there is to be a lasting future for Carrington," he said. "We are proud of the colony, and we are all sportsmen, I think, but it seems to us that it is not wise to make it a mere playground and keep out all but people of our own station. On the contrary it would be better to welcome any well-educated Englishman and make it easier for him to earn a living here. In fact, we want an open-door policy, and a means of providing for the future of our children. It can be provided only by industrial enterprise, which is why I advocate the building of the creamery."

For the first time a cynical smile flickered across Carrington's face.

"Are you speaking for yourself, or for the rest?" he asked.

"For myself certainly," said Lyle. "How far the rest agree with me will be seen if we appeal to them as an assembly with power to decide, which, unless we are forced to it, I think most of us should sooner avoid."

"Then," remarked Carrington dryly, "in your case, at least, I quite fail to see any duty toward posterity. You have always lived among us as a bachelor, Lyle. I suspect your other arguments would appear equally foolish on examination. Will somebody else set out the precise advantages we may expect to derive from this creamery. I wish to see how far the crazy notion has laid hold of you."

Lyle flushed. Some of the younger men laughed, and it is possible that had their leader shown any sign of faltering, the Colonel's sarcastic disapproval would even then have induced them to abandon the scheme. Most of the men of Carrington had, however, made up their minds, and several in succession explained in deferent but determined fashion why they considered it necessary to support Lyle. Carrington, I fancied, found it somewhat difficult to hide his astonishment.

"We are going down to the root of the matter," said the last of them. "We wish to earn money, and not merely to spend it on half-hearted farming; and every desirable settler who takes up Carrington land increases the value of our possessions, and what is more important, our means of progress. We want more bridges, graded roads through the coulées, a stockyard on the railroad, and some day a branch line; and with all deference to you, we mean to get them. If this is impossible under present conditions, those conditions must be changed."

There was a murmur of approval, but watching Colonel Carrington I knew that the man had said too much. In reply to a sharp question as to who was to undertake the building operations my name was mentioned.

"Lorimer of Fairmead! I might have known it!" gasped the Colonel.

Then there was silence as he gazed down the long rows of faces before answering.

"I have listened with painful surprise," he said. "You wish to hear my views, and you shall have them, but first I want to read the agreement made by each one of you when you first settled in Carrington."

He did so, and some of the men looked uncomfortable, for the land-settlement scheme practically made him supreme authority over all matters which the law of Canada did not affect. It also made it clear that he had borne the largest share of the cost of inaugurating the colony. He broke off, and it was a few moments before he went on again.

"I founded this colony, and — I feel compelled to mention it — delivered some of you from difficulties, and brought you here. I have spent my time and money freely for the good of the Carrington district, and I have made it what it is, a place where an English gentleman can live economically if he will work a little, enjoying abundant sport and

the society of his equals. That was my one object, and I have accomplished it, but further I will not go. Green Mountain is the finest cover for game on the prairie, and while I live no man shall cut timber, make roads, or put up a factory there. Neither will I in any way countenance the opening up of Carrington — my Carrington — to industrial exploitation for the influx of all and sundry. I will have no railroad nor any kind of factory within our limits if I can prevent it, and seeing in it the thin end of the wedge I must ask you to abandon the creamery scheme."

He broke off abruptly, and then turned to Lyle again.

"Have you lost your senses, Raymond. Would you make this clean, green land like Lancashire or parts of Pennsylvania?"

One could see by the faces of the others that this shot had told. There was no great liking for commerce in any of those who heard him. They were sportsmen first of all, and they loved the open. Even had the thing been probable none of them would have wished to see Carrington defiled by the smoke of mills and factories. It seemed to me that the Colonel might have bent them to his will had he made some trifling concession or been willing to discuss the matter quietly. Most of them, I felt, would gladly have met him half-way. Still that was never a habit of Colonel Carrington's. He was an autocrat all through, and when he desired anything done he simply commanded it. In a moment or two Lyle answered him.

"No sir," he said. "At least, not exactly, though Lancashire clothes half the people in the world with her cotton, and the roads that have opened up this continent are laid with Pennsylvania steel. Still, as we haven't iron or coal here there's very little probability of our doing what you seem afraid of with Carrington. We believe that the enterprise will prove a general benefit. We merely want good

wagon roads, a creamery, and a few other similar things, and we respectfully ask you not to veto them."

"I can't meet you," said Carrington. "As I said, my suggestion is that this preposterous scheme be abandoned forthwith."

There was for a few moments a silence which seemed intensified by the soft rustle of the curtains as the breeze from the prairie flowed into the room. Then one of the men who had spoken in favor of the creamery rose and looked hard at Lyle who made a little sign.

"Then as a matter of form and to take a vote I second that," he said.

The others were very still, but I saw Carrington gaze at the speaker almost incredulously. Though, as one of them told me afterward, a vote had once before been asked for, it had only established their leader's authority more firmly, and I think this was the first time that any determined opposition had been offered to his will.

"You mean to take a vote?" he asked.

"Yes sir," said another man, and there was a little murmur of concurrence. "I'm afraid there is no other course left open to us."

Again the Colonel stared at them incredulously, and it seemed to me that there was something almost pathetic about the old man's position. Grim and overbearing as he was, he stood alone, and for the first time I think he to some extent realized it. Still, it was evident that he could not bring himself to believe that they would go so far as to overrule his plainly expressed decision.

"Then," he said, "you must proceed to take it. As stipulated in the charter it must be by ballot."

A man who had not spoken yet, stood up. "To save time I move as an amendment that a committee be appointed to confer with Mr. Lorimer, who is here for the purpose, as to

the construction of the creamery and to prepare a workable scheme which will if possible be submitted to this meeting."

It was seconded, and Lyle moved down the long table with a handful of little papers. It was clear that the supporters of the scheme had everything ready, and for the first time a shadow of doubt seemed to creep into Carrington's eyes.

"You are all supplied?" he said at length. "Then we will, as usual, take the amendment first."

One or two of them borrowed a pencil from a neighbor, but it seemed very significant to me that most had one ready, and though I had no part in what was being done, I felt the tension when a man moved down the table collecting the little folded papers on a tray. Then the Colonel signed for him and another man to open them, and I think every eye was fixed on the two men who stood by the window tossing the papers upon a growing pile. There was only one pile, though three little slips were laid suggestively by themselves. Then in the midst of a very impressive silence through which the footsteps broke with a startling distinctness the two men moved toward the head of the table. The rest leaned forward watching their ruler who sat very still and grim in face. I fancied that though he was anxious he could not realize what awaited him.

"They have all voted?" he asked.

"Yes sir," said one of the men in a voice that sounded somewhat strained, and Carrington looked at him sharply.

"The result?" he asked.

"The amendment is carried, sir. There are only three dissentients."

No one spoke, but I think a thrill ran through everybody in the room, and I know the blood rose to my face. Still, I fancy their own sensations troubled very few of my companions for every eye was fixed on their leader, as the

stiffness seemed suddenly to melt out of him. He gasped, and for a moment or two seemed to be struggling to recover himself.

Though I had not expected this I felt sorry for him. All but three of his followers had turned against him, and it was evident after what had been said that their decision implied the subversion of his authority. To a man of his temperament it must have been inexpressibly galling. Then he painfully straightened himself. He had in all probability never been beaten yet, and he had once, so his sister afterward told me, tamed a native levy of irregular cavalry and commanded them for two years in spite of the fact that a number of the dusky troopers had sworn to murder him on opportunity.

"You cannot have the Green Mountain site, and I'll stop this thing yet," he said.

The listeners' faces were a study. Indignation, regret, suppressed sympathy and a determination to maintain their rights, were stamped on them.

They were Englishman born with a due respect for constituted authority who had loyally obeyed a leader of their own class, but they had also the average Englishman's respect for the liberty of the individual, and there were signs of approval when Lyle spoke again.

"We have every respect for you, Colonel Carrington, and the course we have been compelled to take is a painful one, but I think there was no avoiding it," he said. "In regard to the charter, we have kept it faithfully even when you rather overstrained its meaning. Now we can no longer allow it to bar all progress, and we have resolved, if in agreement with one clause it can as I think be done, to entirely remodel it by a unanimous assembly. If not we will sell our holdings and move out in a body onto Government land."

Lyle had faced the crisis. There was nothing left but open defiance, and he did not shrink from it. When he broke off, Carrington, who had listened with the veins swelling on his forehead, rose suddenly. It was evident that he had allowed his passion to master him.

"Will you all turn against me, you dividend-hunting traitors?" he thundered. "You whom I brought here, and spent the best of my life for, squandering my daughter's patrimony on this colony until she too sets her will against me. Then listen to me. You shall do none of the things you say. By heaven, you shall not. There shall never be a factory in my settlement. In spite of you — I say — you shall not — do — one — of them!"

His voice broke, and his jaw dropped. The hand he had swung up fell to his side, and I heard a faint cry as he sank limply into his chair. He lay there with his head on the carved back gazing at his rebellious followers with glassy eyes.

I do not know who was the first to move, but in a moment I was standing near his side, and while a confused bustle commenced behind us I saw Lyle slip an arm beneath his neck.

"Bring water, somebody! Ask Miss Carrington for brandy — don't tell her what it's for," he said. "Hurry, he's either in a fit or choking."

A man brought the spirits, and Lyle mopped Carrington's forehead with a wetted handkerchief, which was probably of no great benefit, while when with the assistance of somebody I managed to open his clenched teeth and pour a little brandy down his throat a faint sign of returning sense crept into his eyes. He looked at us in a puzzled manner, saying in short gasps, "Lorimer and Lyle! You shall not — I tell you!"

I believe this was the last time he ever recognized us.

When his face grew expressionless, Lyle who laid him back again, turned to me.

"Did you notice that he moved as though he had no power in his left side?" he said. "Foster and Broomfield, come here and help me. Armadale, you go and tell Miss Carrington tactfully."

We left consternation behind us when after the return of the unwilling Armadale we carried the Colonel into his great bedroom where he lay breathing stertorously while Foster remained to assist his sister. Then the murmurs broke out as I returned, and each man looked at his neighbor in dismay, until there was once more stillness when dressed in some clinging white fabric Grace stood with a stern, cold face in the doorway.

"You have spoken sufficient for one day," she said, and some of those who heard her afterward observed how like her voice was to her father's. "Enough to kill my father between you. May I ask you, now that you can do no more, to leave this house in quietness."

The climax had filled them with consternation. They had acted in all honesty, and I cannot think they were to blame, but the riders of Carrington, stalwart, courageous men, slunk out like beaten dogs under the gaze of the girl. When they had gone, she beckoned me.

"Ride hard to the railroad, and don't return without a doctor from Winnipeg. I wish to hear no excuses or explanations. Every moment is precious — go!"

I went, much as did the others, and found Lyle who looked very shamefaced fumbling with his saddle cinch outside.

"It's an unfortunate business, but of course we never expected such a sending — heaven forbid!" he said. "Well, if the wires will do it we'll bring out the best doctor they've got in Winnipeg. With all respect to them I

shouldn't like to be Foster left behind to face those two women. Go home, and abuse me for making an unprecedented mess of it if you like, the rest of you!"

It was a hard ride to the railroad, for we did not spare the beasts, and when the instrument clicked out a message that the doctor was ready but could not start before the next day's train Lyle wired back, "Come now in a special. We guarantee expense."

Then he turned to me. "I think we were justified in what we said; but he was our chief, and a good one for a long time. Now I'd give up the whole scheme to set the thing straight again."

In due time we brought a skillful surgeon to Carrington Manor, and waited very anxiously until he descended in search of us.

"It is by no means a common case," he said. "Mental aberration and partial paralysis. Miss Carrington refers me to you for the possible cause of it. I gather that Colonel Carrington was a headstrong man who could brook no opposition to his will and was subjected to great excitement at a meeting you held."

"Yes," replied Lyle. "Without going into unnecessary details, he strenuously resisted a project we had decided on, and the defeat of his wishes apparently came as a shock. He was speaking vehemently and collapsed in the middle of it."

"What one might have anticipated," said the doctor. "I scarcely think the result will be fatal, but Colonel Carrington will never be the same man again. It is quite likely that he will not recover the use of his mental faculties, though it is rather premature to speak definitely yet, and I should not unduly alarm the two ladies." Then, perhaps noticing the genuine distress in Lyle's face, he added, "I don't think you need attribute too much to the incident you mentioned. It was only the last straw, so to speak, for I

fancy the patient had been under a severe mental strain for a long time, and from what his sister tells me he was predisposed to attack, while some other cause would probably have precipitated the crisis."

I sent word asking whether Grace would see me, and receiving an answer that she would see no one I rode moodily back to Fairmead. As Lyle had said, we were sorry, and should have given much to undo what had been done, but it was too late, and I felt that Colonel Carrington who could never have accepted a public defeat had, unyielding to the last, made a characteristic ending.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE NEW RULER OF CARRINGTON

A MONTH slipped by, and though I rode over often to the Manor it was seldom that I had speech with Grace, and never saw her father. The attack had left him with intellect clouded and limbs nearly powerless on one side, while he would hardly permit either his sister or daughter, who were the only persons he apparently recognized, to leave his sight. It was also with some trepidation that I awaited the first interview with Grace, but this vanished when she came in showing signs of an anxious vigil but only pleasure at my presence.

"I am sorry that I spoke so to you, Ralph, that awful day," she said. "For hours together I have thought over all that happened, and though it was hard to overcome a feeling of resentment against the others, and even you at first, I tried to judge them fairly; and, if it is not disloyal to say so, I think they were right. Some day, when there will be many things to settle, I hope to tell them so; but I cannot do it yet."

She would say nothing in the meantime as to her own plans, beyond that before she could consider herself there was much to be arranged that concerned her father and the Manor, and with this I had to be content. Lyle also showed his regret in a practical fashion by visiting the Manor constantly and supervising the farming, though I knew his own holding suffered in consequence, and by his advice young Foster had been appointed bailiff at a salary.

Meanwhile, Harry and I were busy almost night and day, for when the sowing was finished I brought out carpenters and set them to work extending Fairmead, while with our own hands we hewed wind-felled timber where we could find it in the bluffs ready for them and the creamery. It was often necessary to ride long leagues for birches stout enough, and we frequently slept on the bare earth or in the wagon beside our work.

To please a friend in Winnipeg I had accepted the services of a destitute British mechanic, who, when he arrived at Fairmead, with his fare advanced at our expense, demanded the highest wages paid in Canada, and then expressed grave doubts as to whether he could conscientiously undertake the more laborious parts of the framing, because he was a cabinet joiner, and this, so he said, was carpenter's work. We had met others of the kind before, who had made their employers' lives a burden in the old country, but they were the exception, after all.

"You can please yourself," said Harry. "I'm a landowner and ploughman; but if I hadn't my hands full already I'd tackle anything, from making bricks to framing bridges, for the wages you're getting. However, to please you, we'll call the operation joinery."

We had further trouble with this individual, who continually lamented he had ever come to a country wherein there was no beer, and derided his Ontario comrade for doing too much. The longer a job lasted the better for those employed on it and the rest of the profession, he said: to which, as we heard later, the Ontario man replied: "If the job lasts too long in this country they pretty well fire you out of it."

At last, returning one morning wet with dew from a damp bed on a bluff, where we had slept after toiling late the night before, we decided to dispense with his services.

"Good heavens, man! if you get on at that rate it will take you two years to finish," I said, when I found him tranquilly notching the ends of some beams with mallet and chisel. "How long do you spend over one? And didn't I tell you to use the axe?"

"Half a day to make a good job! There's no man in Canada can teach me what tools to use," he said; and, being stiff all over, I turned to Harry.

"There's a fair edge on that axe. You might show him," I suggested.

Harry, who was in a hurry, flung off his jacket, badly tearing it; and for a while the heavy blade made flashes in the sunlight, while the white chips leaped up in showers, until, flinging down the axe, he pulled out his watch.

"Ten minutes exactly — you can dress it another five," he said. "Now are you willing to do it in that way? No? I didn't suppose you would be. Well, we won't detain you. Give him his fare to Winnipeg and some breakfast, Ralph — it will pay you."

I found Ormond's horses useful; for between timber-cutting, marking down growing hay, rides to purchase cattle, and visits to the Manor, we often covered fifty miles a day, with hard work besides; while, when we brought out Ontario bushmen, Fairmead and the creamery lumber piles increased rapidly in size, and our bank balance diminished as rapidly. Once, too, when I came home so weary that I could scarcely get out of the saddle, I found a black-edged letter awaiting me, and dropped heavily into a chair after opening it.

"I hope there's no bad news," said Aline; "it has an American stamp. Who can it be?"

"Cousin Alice! You might read it — the sun and the grass dust have almost blinded me."

Martin Lorimer had written the letter from a little

town in Southern California, and Aline read: "I am in sore distress, Ralph. Your poor cousin died here yesterday of an old sickness she had long greatly suffered from. She was my only child — all that was left me; and I'm going back to England a very lonely man. I'll ask you in a post or two to meet me."

"I am very sorry, and yet it may have been a release," said Aline. "Hers was a very hard lot to bear, but she was always cheerful. Poor Uncle Martin! Of course you will go to meet him."

I did so later when, as a special favor, a mounted man brought me a telegram from Elktail, and Martin Lorimer gripped my fingers hard when I boarded the east-bound train at that station.

"I knew thee would come, Ralph, and I was longing for a face that I knew," he said. "Ay, to the last my poor girl remembered thee. I'm going home to England — stayed here too long; and Canada seems empty without her. Only time to catch the liner, or I'd have come to Fairmead, and I've much to tell thee on the road to Winnipeg."

He looked sadly shaken, but glad to meet any kinsman in his trouble, and, asking few questions, I listened quietly while, ensconced in a corner of a first-class car, he relieved his soul with talk. He told me much that surprised me, but which is not connected with this story, until I started when he said: "Now I may tell thee that it was Alice sent that money. She did it main cleverly,— her own savings, poor girl; I'm glad I never stinted her in the matter of money. 'You can tell him when I'm gone, father; it pleased me well to know I had helped to make him happy,' she said. Then again, almost at the end, she whispered: 'Tell Ralph I wish him a long life, and the best this world can give him and Miss Carrington.'"

Martin Lorimer coughed vigorously before he con-

tinued: "I never heard a word about that loan until I guessed from thy tale at the chalet that my girl, never suspecting it, had countered my plans. Well, well, it was all as it had to be; but if she had never helped thee maybe another Lorimer would be waiting instead of a stranger to carry on the Orb Mill when I've done with it."

We were nearing the Red River, and the roofs of Winnipeg lifted themselves higher above the prairie, when he said, for Martin Lorimer, almost timidly, "Remembering our talk at the chalet, canst change thy mind, lad, or is it too late?"

"It is too late, Uncle Martin," I answered with reluctance, for I longed to do something to comfort him. "As I told you, even if I were ready there are others to consider now."

He sighed before he answered sadly: "Ay, thou'lt take thy own road; it's born in thee. Then follow it steadfastly, and God bless thee. Some day I'll come back to Fairmead, but I must have time to get over this blow."

Ten minutes later we parted, and it was some hours after the Atlantic express pulled out of Winnipeg before I recovered my serenity. I could not forget the kindness of my dead cousin, who, in spite of sickness and physical suffering, had so cleverly aided me in my time of need.

The next event of moment happened when Foster brought me a message from Grace requesting my presence at the Manor on the following day. Most of the men of Carrington were also expected, Foster said. I reached the Manor at the appointed time, and made the latter portion of the journey in company with several of the colonists, and it was with mingled curiosity and reluctance that we gathered in the great hall.

Except that the air was warmer and there were flowers and feathery grasses in the tall vases, it looked much the same

as it did on our last eventful visit, though there was now no grim figure in the carved oak chair. No one knew why we had been summoned except Lyle and myself, and I did not know wholly. So there was a buzz of curious whispers, until Lyle flung back the doors, and Grace, followed by Miss Carrington, appeared in the opening. They were dressed alike in some neutral-tinted fabric, and with one accord the riders of Carrington rose to their feet, and stood fast and motionless until with a queenly gesture Grace seated herself in the oaken chair. Grace was younger than myself by two full years, but there was no trace of diffidence about her as she looked down out of steady eyes at the men who, as it were, did homage before her. Then deep silence followed as she said with a perfect distinctness:

"It was fitting after what has happened that I should send for you. My father founded this colony, and still nominally holds the greater portion of the land in it. As you know, he has been stricken — and has lost his reason; and accordingly the management of the estate devolves upon Miss Carrington and myself — principally, under his last will, on myself. It is a heavy responsibility for two women, to do the best, not only for Carrington Manor, but for the Carrington colony, until it shall please the Almighty to restore its founder — or grant him release. While the Manor lands remain intact and the agreement binding, all that affects our welfare affects that of the whole settlement."

Grace paused, and a man rose upright at the further end of the hall.

"We came here with a feeling of contrition, yet not wholly ashamed," he said. "On behalf of all I offer the new mistress of Carrington our deepest sympathy and an assurance of good-will," and again there was a deep murmur of chivalrous respect from the sun and wind-bronzed men.

Grace's gaze was not so steady and her voice was lower as she answered, "I thank you. It is a barren heritage, weighted down by debt, but with the help of my kinsman Lyle we shall do our utmost to improve it. Still, it was not that that I wanted to tell you. How we last parted you know," and some of those I noticed showed a darker color in their cheeks, as though it were an unpleasant memory. "Since then I have tried to consider rightly all that led up to it, and I ask you to forgive me."

"It was our own blind precipitancy. I am afraid you spoke the truth," a voice said; but raising her hand for silence Grace went on:

"As I said, this estate entails a heavy responsibility, and I have been considering what I should do concerning the creamery. My father acted as seemed right according to his judgment, and I do not know all his reasons, but now that the decision devolves upon me I am impelled to act according to my own. No two people see the same thing under the same aspect, and — this is no disrespect to him — I dare not do otherwise. I think the creamery will enhance the settlement's prosperity, and though I cannot grant the Green Mountain site, in which you must bear with me, you may take the next best, the Willow Grove, with its timber and water, at an appraised value, to be represented by stock in the creamery. This is all I have to tell you, and until I resign this position to Miss Carrington I trust to enjoy your friendship and good-will. You will, I hope, decide, before you go when to start the work."

"There is still a ruler of Carrington; we haven't a Salic law. We are all your servants, madam," a big man said, and when some one cried, "To the Princess of Carrington," the rafters rang to the thunderous cheer, while once more I wondered that Grace should ever have listened to me. Whether it was born in her, an hereditary

dowry, or was the result of her father's influence and company, I do not know, but Grace, who could at other times be only womanly, spoke to the riders of Carrington with the air of a sovereign. And yet it appeared perfectly seemly that she should do so, for whether mirthful, commanding, or pitiful, Grace was in all things natural. Neither is this prejudice in her favor on my part, for it is well known on the Assiniboian prairie. Still, even after work had commenced on the creamery and the finances of the Manor were adjusted temporarily, Grace would give me no definite promise as to when she would leave it for Fairmead. As yet her first duty was toward the helpless old man and the charge he had left her, she said.

By one of the striking coincidences that it is hard to believe are accidents, it happened that as we mounted outside the Manor a buggy came around one corner of the house, and with a feeling akin to consternation we turned to regard its occupant. A hired man held the reins, but beside him, wrapped in a fur coat although the day was warm, sat Colonel Carrington, a shivering, huddled object propped against the backboard. It was the first time we had seen him, and the sight troubled us, for the few weeks had made great changes in the ruler of Carrington.

"I'm afraid I'm breaking orders," the driver explained. "Miss Grace said wait until you all had gone, but he would come, and I hadn't the heart to refuse him. He's not understanding much these days, but we take him out for an hour or two, when he's able for it, in the sun."

Colonel Carrington regarded us as if we were strangers, as with a pitiful courtesy some raised their hats to him. He attempted with one hand to strike a match and dropped it, and after Lyle ignited another and held it to his cigar he nodded cordially. "I thank you, sir," he said with an entire absence of recognition. "I am not quite

as strong as I used to be. Could you tell me how far it is to Lone Hollow? I seem to have forgotten the way, and the snow is soft and heavy."

It was a relief to all of us when the buggy drove off, and the assembly broke up with a sudden chill upon its enthusiasm.

One evening later I was walking home past Hudson's dwelling when I noticed a curious cloud of dust hanging over the house, and strange sounds proceeding from it. They suggested that somebody was vigorously brushing it, which was certainly unusual. Now Hudson, though he held a quarter-section of Government land, had really no legal claim to it, because he had neither broken sufficient virgin sod nor put the necessary acreage under cultivation. He freely admitted that he was prejudiced against hard work, and, when in need of a few dollars to purchase actual necessities that he could not borrow, he would drive away with his wagon and peddle German oleographs and patent medicines to the less-educated settlers, returning after several weeks' absence to settle down again to a period of loafing.

Aline and her friend Lilian Kenyon, as well as the latter's brother were with me.

"What on earth can they be doing inside there, and what a noise they are making," said Miss Kenyon.

"It shows that my good counsel has not all fallen on stony soil," Aline answered laughingly. "Harry — that is Mr. Lorraine — is apparently seriously engaged in spring cleaning. I have been giving him lessons lately on the virtues of cleanliness."

Understanding the process, I grinned at this, and fancied, though I could not be certain, that Aline's fair companion envied her the opportunity for giving Harry lessons on anything. When the next cloud of dust rolled out of the window an irate voice came with it:

"I'm the biggest slouch on the prairie, eh; I'll pretty well show you nobody takes liberties with me. I'm almighty sick of this fooling already; there goes your confounded bucket, and the rest of the blamed caboodle after it."

Lilian Kenyon started when a bucket fell clattering at her feet, a brush came hurtling toward us, and amid wild language a grimy figure appeared at the window, dropping chairs and other furniture wholesale out of it, while her brother, who strove to conceal his merriment, observed:

"Say, hadn't you two better come on with me? It's getting late already, and Hudson is not as particular as he ought to be when he's angry."

"I agree with you," said Aline in a tone of severity. "He is a very disgraceful man, and by no means a fit companion for Harry. Ralph, I am sorry there are occasions when both of you indulge in unwarranted expressions. Don't you think such conduct unbecoming in an elder brother, or any respectable landowner, Lily?"

I laughed and Miss Kenyon looked indignant when I answered: "Then go along; you don't understand our trials, or you wouldn't condemn us. It can only be natural depravity that leads Harry to persist in living with such a companion when half the girls on the prairie are willing to provide him with a better one."

They had hardly left me when, disheveled and dusty, Hudson strode forth in wrathful disgust.

"It's almighty hard when a man can't live peacefully in his own home without your confounded partner brushing all over it," he muttered, "I guess it's your sister's doing — I knew there would be trouble when she came in, stepping like a gopher on wet ploughing, with her skirts held up. Anyway, I'm blamed well sick of Canada, and them Government land fellows are coming right down on me, so I'm just going to drop the whole thing and skip. I'm going

to sell the place for an old song, or burn it, and light out for Dakota."

I frowned, for this was the first time I had heard of Aline's visit, and it struck me that although I suffered from her craze for neatness at Fairmead she was overstepping the bounds in attempting to reform Hudson's homestead too; but Harry evidently overheard him, for he came out.

"Try to talk sensible for once, Hudson," he said. "See here, I don't want to take advantage of your beastly temper, but if you are really bent on selling the place, and not vaporing as usual, I'm open to make you an offer."

"I've been willing to sell it for two years," Hudson answered with a grin. "Haven't done half my legal breaking, and don't mean to, so it's not mine to sell, and would have to remain registered to me until the improvements were completed. Then, you see, I could come back, and jump you."

"I don't think you could," said Harry. "You might hurt yourself trying it. How much do you call a fair thing for the holding as it stands, bearing in mind our risk in buying what is only the good-will with the owner absent?"

They haggled over the terms for a while, and then Harry turned to me.

"We can do it at a stretch, Ralph, by paying him so much after the crop's sold for the next two years. Of course, it's a big handful, but there's lots of sloo hay that would feed winter stock, and I want the house badly. Indeed, if I don't get it I'm going to build one. Don't you think we could take the risk?"

I thought hard for a few minutes. We were speculating boldly, and already had undertaken rather more than we could manage; but the offer was tempting, and, noting Harry's eagerness, I agreed.

"Yes; we will chance it," I said, "on his own terms of

yearly payments, although heaven only knows how we're going to finance it if the crop dies off. Hudson, I'll give you a small check to-morrow if you are satisfied, but it's fair to tell you that if you stayed and completed the improvements you would get more for it when you held the patent."

"That's all right," said Hudson. "I guess I'll take the check. You may have the building and the hundred and sixty blanked acres, scarcely ten of them broken. It's easier peddling pictures than farming, any day, and no one else would buy it in the circumstances. It's not even mine without the patent, and if I die in the meantime you'll get nothing."

"We'll get the crop and the cattle feed; you don't suppose we've bought it to look at; and if you died the pay would stop," said Harry dryly, and turned toward me when Hudson, moving away contented, sat down to enjoy a peaceful smoke.

"That settles it, Ralph," he said. "The deal ought to show a good result, and I wanted the house. Now that I have got it, it's time for me to ask you a question which would have to be answered presently in any case. I was waiting to see how things would go, out of fairness to her, but as we have bound ourselves hard and fast to Fairmead for several years at least, I'm going to ask you a great thing. Will you give me Aline?"

"Will she have you?" I said smiling.

"That's just what I don't know," Harry answered rather dismally. "Sometimes I hope so, and sometimes I've a cold fear that she won't. But now that I've told you, I'll ask her this very evening. You'll wish me Godspeed, won't you?"

I looked at him with sympathy, for I knew the feeling, and I had some experience of Aline's moods. Then I laid

my hand on his shoulder. "We have been as brothers for a long time, Harry, and it would be only good news if you strengthen the tie. If Aline has the wisdom I give her credit for, she won't say no, and there's no one in the Dominion I should sooner trust her to."

"Then I'll make the plunge," said Harry. "Ralph, I'm very grateful for your good-will. Hudson, where did you fling that confounded bucket? Get up and straighten yourself, and go after Miss Kenyon. Take her anywhere away from Miss Lorimer, and, if you feel like it, make love to her. You're not bad-looking when you wash yourself, and I think she has a fancy for you."

"Not much!" said Hudson grinning as he refilled his pipe. "I've had one experience in that line, and I don't want another. No, sir, henceforward I leave women alone."

Harry went back to the house to shed his working attire, and I strode on toward Fairmead, leaving Hudson sitting among his furniture and kitchen utensils on the darkening prairie, smoking tranquilly. The stars shone out when Harry and Aline came in together. Harry looked exultant, Aline unusually subdued, and the first thing she did was, to my astonishment, to kiss me.

"Aline has promised to marry me before the winter," said Harry.

Wishing them every happiness I went out and left them. I was occupied two hours over some badly needed repairs to the granary, and then for a long time I stood under the stars thinking of Grace.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

HENCEFORWARD Harry's wooing, like my own, was conducted in an intermittent and fragmentary manner. But little time was left us for dalliance or soft speeches, and we paid our homage in practical fashion, with axe and saw and bridle, for there was truth in what Harry said: "The best compliment a man can pay a woman is to work for her comfort. Still, I don't know that more leisure for other things wouldn't be pleasant, too. There is more in life after all than an endless round of sowing and reaping."

Jasper was among the first to congratulate him, which he did so heartily that I concluded that he had stopped his visits in time, and it was with a repetition of his former kindness that he added:

"You'll need to rustle this season, for you've plainly bitten off more than you can chew. Still, you've friends on the prairie who'll see you through, and if it's horses or men or money you're stuck for, I guess you know where to find them."

We borrowed oxen, we borrowed mowers, we hired help everywhere, and somehow paid for it, while by dint of endless planning we managed to avoid an overdraft at the bank. Still, I lamed Ormond's hunter, and dawn was often in the sky when I rode home from the Manor to begin the day's round again without resting. But our efforts prospered, and the weather favored us, while Jasper and other neighbors, including some from Carrington, helped us on opportunity,

until one summer day I rode over to the Manor to press for a decision. I hesitated when I got there, for I was heavy from want of sleep and troubled about many small matters, and, when Grace greeted me, she looked so fresh and tranquil that it seemed unfair to bring the stains of turmoil and fierce hurry into her presence.

"You are tired, poor Ralph," she said, laying a cool hand on my forehead when I drew her down beside me. "The sun has darkened you to the color of a Blackfoot. You are thin, and there are too many wrinkles on your brow — put them away immediately. I wonder whether any one would recognize in you the fresh-faced and somewhat callow strippling with whom I talked about the Dominion that day on Starcross Moor. It is not so very long ago, and yet life has greatly changed and taught us much since then. You must not be vain about it, but I really think I prefer you now."

She strove to avoid my answer, which was an active one, and then settled to grave attention when I said: "You were always the same, Grace, unequaled among women. I was very raw and foolish, but you have helped me, and experience in these new lands teaches even fools. Now, however, I am chiefly lonely — and Fairmead is waiting for you."

"I wish to know my duty," said Grace. "I still think and think until my brain grows tired, and yet I cannot see it clearly. As I told the others, the Manor is an undesirable inheritance; but I am its mistress, and it brings heavy charges with it, a load of debt among them, which it would seem cruel to leave my aunt to grapple with. If we sold it there would be nothing left for her, and even that might not be possible while my father lives. Ralph, dear, he was once very kind to me, and it is hard that I can do so little to help him."

She sighed, and looking at me wearily made no answer to my further pleading, until, as it happened, Miss Carrington, preceded by a very awkward Scandinavian maid, entered the room with a tray on which was placed the Russian tea and dainties for which the house was famous.

"You looked in need of refreshment, Ralph, when you came in," she said. "There have been changes at the Manor, but we have not forsaken all our ancient customs."

She was, as Aline said, "a dear old lady," sweet of face, yet stately, though now she looked careworn too; and rising I bowed respectfully, as, acting under one of those sudden impulses which are sometimes better than judgment, I said:

"I hope you will believe that no one regrets the changes more than I do, and it is only trusting in your kindness that I venture to look for a welcome here. There cannot be many who would so kindly receive one who even against his will has been indirectly connected with your troubles. Besides, I have been abusing your generosity further by trying to persuade Grace to desert you, and, strangest of all, I ask you to help me."

Grace blushed, and her aunt sat silent for a while.

"I am glad you told me," she then answered quietly, "for I have been thinking what she ought to do. I wondered now and then that my niece did not ask me, and I am going to tell my thoughts to both of you. There is a will extant leaving her this property, with a portion to me, but it will be a long struggle to free the land from its creditors, and my poor brother may live as he is for years. He has been mercifully spared all further anxiety, and I hope that he will. I am old, and my day has long gone by. Grace is young, with the world before her; and it is neither right nor necessary that she should put away all hope of happiness indefinitely. There is only one time

when the joy of life is more real than its sorrows. With kinsman Lyle's counsel, and Foster to work the land, I can hold the Manor and care for my brother, and for both to remain here would be a useless sacrifice. So if you love her, as I believe you do, it is right that you should enjoy together what is sent you. Grace should go to you."

I had passed my younger days among a homely people, and had been taught little except what I learned in the silence of the mountains and on the wide prairie, and yet I think it was without awkwardness that I bent over Miss Carrington's hand. Speech would hardly have expressed the gratitude and respect I felt, while I recognize now that the motive of the action was in her and not in me. Then I turned to her niece and waited with longing in my eyes until Grace, who had changed to her softest mood and was now only a blushing girl, said simply:

"You have made it easy, Aunt. Ralph, I will come."

"That is right," said Miss Carrington. "Ralph, you have waited patiently, and I can trust you to be kind to her." Then she smiled upon us as she added: "If not, I take my brother's place, and you shall answer for it. There is still a Carrington at the Manor holding authority. And so, to turn to the practical, if either of you can consider such prosaic things as tea, it is growing cold already, and it is a pity to waste the Carrington tea."

The tea was not wasted. We are only creatures of flesh and blood, thankful, the wiser among us, for the transitory glimmer of romance that brightens our work-a-day lot, and gives some much-needed strength to grapple with it, and I had ridden far after a night spent in the open and a hard morning's work. So I accepted what was offered, and found it delicious to rest in that pretty room, where the last of the sunlight sparkled on the silver and lit up the sweet face of the lady who beamed upon us. Again

it seemed almost too good to be true, and hard to believe, that victory had crowned the struggle, while even as I balanced the dainty China cup it reminded me of the battered kettle from which we filled the blackened cans in a British Columbian camp. There, instead of embroidered curtains, were festoons of cedar sprays, biting cold and acrid wood-smoke in place of warmth and artistic luxury, and I knew that I had been favored greatly — for though many strive, the victory is to the few. Still, from out of the shadows of the somber firs, I seemed to hear our partner who lay among the boulders say: "The long, long road has a turning, and there is rest at last."

Before I left the Manor late that night all was settled, for when I pressed for an early conclusion Grace, yielding, said: "I am not afraid of poverty, Ralph; and if it comes we will lighten it by each bearing half. So we will take the risk of the harvest together, for if I share in your prosperity I must also take my share in the hardship."

I did not get home to Fairmead until the next day, for I nodded in the saddle until I could not see the way, and several times nearly fell out of it, and when the tired horse stopped on a bluff I found a couch in withered fern and slept there soundly, to waken long after sunrise, wet with dew. That, however, was a trifling matter on the Western prairie, because the man who loves small comforts has no business there, and after the events of the previous day discomfort was nothing to me. Dreams seldom trouble the toiler in that land; and when I stood up refreshed under the early sunlight, and memory returned, the world seemed filled with light and beauty to reflect my own gladness. Ormond's horse was cropping the grasses not far away, and when I caught him the very birch leaves rustled joyfully under their tender shimmering green as we rode over the bluff, while once out on the prairie a flight of sand-hill

cranes came up from the south, calling to one another, dazzling blurs of whiteness against the blue, and even their hoarse cry seemed to ring with triumph.

Aline ran out to meet me when I dismounted, and my mood must have been infectious, for she smiled as she greeted me.

"I sent Harry to scour the prairie in search of you, for I feared you must have been dead tired and the horse had fallen in a ravine. But you must have slept among the fairies, Ralph, and risen transfigured. You look too radiant for my serious brother."

It was after hay-time, and the wheat was tall and green, when Grace and I were married in the little wooden church at Carrington, and every man in the settlement rode there in her train. Few princesses of royal blood ever had a finer escort than hers, and she came in state, as was due to her — for Grace was a prairie princess and the heiress of Carrington. Perhaps the memory of what had happened made her subjects doubly anxious to show their loyalty; while, remembering who I was, and how I landed in that country a poor emigrant, once more I found it hard to understand why of all men such a gift had been bestowed on me.

The riders of Carrington also filled one room at the Manor with glittering tokens of their good-will from Toronto and Montreal, besides such useful things as tools and harness, while among the presents lay a plain letter with a black border which Grace and I read together. It was from Martin Lorimer. "I wish you both many blessings," it ran, "and knowing your foolish way of thinking, I could not send the present I wanted to; but you'll take this, with an old man's very good wishes. It's a certificate of paid-up stock in the new Day Spring Mining Company, of which Calvart is manager. Sell or hold as pleases you. You'll find a market — for already Calvert's sending up good ore.

I also send you something else — your cousin valued it."

Another paper fluttered out of the envelope, and my amusement died away as I recognized the letter I had given the bankers in Winnipeg when I drew upon the loan.

"Of all the gifts I value this from poor Alice most," I said a little huskily. "We should have gone under without it, and perhaps it alone helped me to win you. Grace, to both of us, this is the strangest of wedding presents; but what shall we do with these shares in the Day Spring mine? They represent the principal portion of the paid-up capital."

"You will keep them," Grace said. "I think I understand why he sent them. I had a very bitter feeling against your uncle, but I have conquered it. The past is never done with, and it may be that what my father toiled for and lost will come to his daughter in its own way. Ralph, there's a story of hope and struggle and sorrow written between every line on either paper."

We rode, in accordance with prairie custom, straight home from the church, for Grace was no longer princess of Carrington, but the wife of a struggling farmer, and she said that until the harvest was gathered there must be no honeymoon. Fairmead, as all the inhabitants of the prairie know, was only a small holding hampered by lack of capital when she married its owner and forthwith commenced to live in strict accordance with her adopted station. We hoped to improve that station, but this depended on the crops and the weather, and the heavens continued to favor us that year. Seldom had there been such grass for cattle or such a yield of wheat. No acre returned less than its twenty bushels, and many nearer forty; while Grace, who drove the first binder into the tall yellow stems and worked on through the rush and dust of harvest and thrashing, rejoiced as she said she had never done when all was safely gathered in.

Then Harry and Aline were married and settled in Hud-

son's dwelling; and one evening toward the close of the Indian summer, when our work was done at last we drove slowly down the long incline away from Fairmead. A maple flamed red on the bluff, the birch leaves were golden; but the prairie was lone and empty, save for a breadth of tall stubble, and there was neither a sack in the granary nor a beast in a stall. Harry had taken the working cattle, while the stock were traveling eastward across the ocean and the wheat lay piled in the elevators or had been ground already into finest flour. But the result of our labors was bearing interest, and would do so until spring, in the shape of a balance at the Bank of Montreal. Each venture had succeeded, and evidence was not wanting that at last we were being carried smoothly forward on the flood-tide of prosperity; and so with thankful hearts we prepared to enjoy a well-earned holiday in the older cities of eastern Canada.

The garish light died out as we passed the last of the stubble, which grew dusky behind us, the stars that shone forth one by one glimmered frostily, and silence closed down on the prairie, while the jingle of harness and the groaning of wheels recalled the day I had first driven across it. Grace, too, seemed lost in reverie, for presently she said:

"Another year's work ended, and the bounteous harvest in. Ralph, why is it that happiness brings with it a tinge of melancholy, and that out of our present brightness we look back to the shadows of other days? I have been thinking all day of curious things and people we knew — our first dance at Lone Hollow, of Geoffrey Ormond and your cousin. They all played their part in giving us what we now enjoy."

I cracked the whip, stirring the horses into a quicker pace, and, slipping one arm around her, I said: "It is not those who work or suffer most who are always rewarded

as they would hope to be; and, as Johnston once said, the fallen have done great things. But we will look forward. You made true forecasts that night at Lone Hollow, and no fairer witch ever came out of Lancashire. So look again deep into the future, and tell me what you see."

Grace laughed, and nestled closer to me under the furs, for the nights were chilly, before she answered: "There are compensations, and one cannot have everything, so I lost the gift of prophecy when a better one came to me — and, Ralph, it came that very night at the Hollow, I think. Instead, I will tell you what I hope to see. First, you faithful to your task, as faithful to me, laying together acre on acre and adding crop to crop until the possessions of Fairmead are greater than Carrington. But even before this comes — and come, I think, it will — we will try to remember that we are but stewards, and that possession brings its duties. My father was a keen sportsman, and I, too, love a horse and gun, but we thought too much of pleasure at Carrington. We will fling our doors wide open to the English poor — there are no poor in the Dominion like the English poor — and share with the needy the harvests that are granted us. I have been thinking often of your helper, Lee, and as a beginning he could send you two families in the spring — we have room for them. And so, Ralph, if you will humor me in this I shall never be sorry to preside over Fairmead instead of Carrington."

"I will," I answered simply; but she seemed content with the answer, and asked for no further assurance as we drove on through the night. No one could laugh more joyously than Grace, or cast about her flashes of brighter humor; but we had just completed an arduous task whose reward was greater almost than we dared hope, and our gladness was too great to find expression in merriment.

On reaching the Elktail station I was handed a tele-

gram from Calvert which had lain there some time awaiting an opportunity for delivery. It was brief, but reassuring.

"Great news. Bottomed on rich ore at last. Day Spring stock cent. per cent. premium. Don't sell. Looking for surprising dividends."

"This is the beginning," said Grace. "Some day all the rest will come."

And then, with a blast of the whistle and the lighted cars clashing as they lurched up out of the prairie, the Atlantic express rolled in and bore us east to enjoy our belated honeymoon.

Grace's prediction was fulfilled, for although we had reverses we prospered from that day, and there are now few farms anywhere on the wide grass-lands between Winnipeg and Regina, to compare, either in area or fertility, with Fairmead, while the flour made from our wheat is spread across the breadth of Europe. And better than lands and stock is the content and peace that came to me through Grace's companionship.

THE END

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DARNLEY. A Romance of the times of Henry VIII. and Cardinal Wolsey. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

WINDSOR CASTLE. A Historical Romance of the Reign of Henry VIII Catharine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. By Wm. Harrison Ainsworth. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by George Cruikshank. Price $1.00.

"Windsor Castle" is the story of Henry VIII., Catharine, and Anne Boleyn. "Bluff King Hal," although a well-loved monarch, was none too good a one in many ways. Of all his selfishness and unwarrantable acts, none was more discreditable than his divorce from Catharine, and his marriage to the beautiful Anne Boleyn. The King's love was as brief as it was vehement. Jane Seymour, waiting maid on the Queen, attracted him, and Anne Boleyn was forced to the block to make room for her successor. This romance is one of extreme interest to all readers.

HORSESHOE ROBINSON. A tale of the Tory Ascendency in South Carolina in 1780. By John P. Kennedy Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

Among the old favorites in the field of what is known as historical fiction, there are none which appeal to a larger number of Americans than Horseshoe Robinson, and this because it is the only story which depicts with fidelity to the facts the heroic efforts of the colonists in South Carolina to defend their homes against the brutal oppression of the British under such leaders as Cornwallis and Tarleton.

The reader is charmed with the story of love which forms the thread of the tale, and then impressed with the wealth of detail concerning those times. The picture of the manifold sufferings of the people, is never overdrawn, but painted faithfully and honestly by one who spared neither time nor labor in his efforts to present in this charming love story all that price in blood and tears which the Carolinians paid as their share in the winning of the republic.

Take it all in all, "Horseshoe Robinson" is a work which should be found on every book-shelf, not only because it is a most entertaining story, but because of the wealth of valuable information concerning the colonists which it contains. That it has been brought out once more, well illustrated, is something which will give pleasure to thousands who have long desired an opportunity to read the story again, and to the many who have tried vainly in these latter days to procure a copy that they might read it for the first time.

THE PEARL OF ORR'S ISLAND. A story of the Coast of Maine. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Cloth, 12mo. Illustrated. Price, $1.00.

Written prior to 1862, the "Pearl of Orr's Island" is ever new; a book filled with delicate fancies, such as seemingly array themselves anew each time one reads them. One sees the "sea like an unbroken mirror all around the pine-girt, lonely shores of Orr's Island," and straightway comes "the heavy, hollow moan of the surf on the beach, like the wild angry howl of some savage animal."

Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

There is no more faithful portrayal of New England life than that which Mrs. Stowe gives in "The Pearl of Orr's Island."

RICHELIEU. A tale of France in the reign of King Louis XIII. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

In 1829 Mr. James published his first romance, "Richelieu," and was recognized at once as one of the masters of the craft.

In this book he laid the story during those later days of the great cardinal's life, when his power was beginning to wane, but while it was yet sufficiently strong to permit now and then of volcanic outbursts which overwhelmed foes and carried friends to the topmost wave of prosperity. One of the most striking portions of the story is that of Cinq Mar's conspiracy; the method of conducting criminal cases, and the political trickery resorted to by royal favorites, affording a better insight into the statecraft of that day than can be had even by an exhaustive study of history. It is a powerful romance of love and diplomacy, and in point of thrilling and absorbing interest has never been excelled.

A COLONIAL FREE-LANCE. A story of American Colonial Times. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

A book that appeals to Americans as a vivid picture of Revolutionary scenes. The story is a strong one, a thrilling one. It causes the true American to flush with excitement, to devour chapter after chapter, until the eyes smart, and it fairly smokes with patriotism. The love story is a singularly charming idyl.

THE TOWER OF LONDON. A Historical Romance of the Times of Lady Jane Grey and Mary Tudor. By Wm. Harrison Ainsworth. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by George Cruikshank. Price, $1.00.

This romance of the "Tower of London" depicts the Tower as palace, prison and fortress, with many historical associations. The era is the middle of the sixteenth century.

The story is divided into two parts, one dealing with Lady Jane Grey, and the other with Mary Tudor as Queen, introducing other notable characters of the era. Throughout the story holds the interest of the reader in the midst of intrigue and conspiracy, extending considerably over a half a century.

IN DEFIANCE OF THE KING. A Romance of the American Revolution. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

Mr. Hotchkiss has etched in burning words a story of Yankee bravery, and true love that thrills from beginning to end, with the spirit of the Revolution. The heart beats quickly, and we feel ourselves taking a part in the exciting scenes described. His whole story is so absorbing that you will sit up far into the night to finish it. As a love romance it is charming.

GARTHOWEN. A story of a Welsh Homestead. By Allen Raine. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

"This is a little idyl of humble life and enduring love, laid bare before us, very real and pure, which in its telling shows us some strong points of Welsh character—the pride, the hasty temper, the quick dying out of wrath. . . . We call this a well-written story, interesting alike through its romance and its glimpses into another life than ours. A delightful and clever picture of Welsh village life. The result is excellent."—Detroit Free Press.

MIFANWY. The story of a Welsh Singer. By Allan Raine. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

"This is a love story, simple, tender and pretty as one would care to read. The action throughout is brisk and pleasing; the characters, it is apparent at once, are as true to life as though the author had known them all personally. Simple in all its situations, the story is worked up in that touching and quaint strain which never grows wearisome, no matter how often the lights and shadows of love are introduced. It rings true, and does not tax the imagination."—Boston Herald.

THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER. A Romance of the Early Settlers in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

A book rather out of the ordinary is this "Spirit of the Border." The main thread of the story has to do with the work of the Moravian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. Incidentally the reader is given details of the frontier life of those hardy pioneers who broke the wilderness for the planting of this great nation. Chief among these, as a matter of course, is Lewis Wetzel, one of the most peculiar, and at the same time the most admirable of all the brave men who spent their lives battling with the savage foe, that others might dwell in comparative security.

Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

CAPTAIN BRAND, OF THE SCHOONER CENTIPEDE. By Lieut. Henry A. Wise, U. S. N. (Harry Gringo). Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

The re-publication of this story will please those lovers of sea yarns who delight in so much of the salty flavor of the ocean as can come through the medium of a printed page, for never has a story of the sea and those "who go down in ships" been written by one more familiar with the scenes depicted.

The one book of this gifted author which is best remembered, and which will be read with pleasure for many years to come, is "Captain Brand," who, as the author states on his title page, was a "pirate of eminence in the West Indies." As a sea story pure and simple, "Captain Brand" has never been excelled, and as a story of piratical life, told without the usual embellishments of blood and thunder, it has no equal.

NICK OF THE WOODS. A story of the Early Settlers of Kentucky. By Robert Montgomery Bird. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

This most popular novel and thrilling story of early frontier life in Kentucky was originally published in the year 1837. The novel, long out of print, had in its day a phenomenal sale, for its realistic presentation of Indian and frontier life in the early days of settlement in the South, narrated in the tale with all the art of a practiced writer. A very charming love romance runs through the story. This new and tasteful edition of "Nick of the Woods" will be certain to make many new admirers for this enchanting story from Dr. Bird's clever and versatile pen.

GUY FAWKES. A Romance of the Gunpowder Treason. By Wm. Harrison Ainsworth. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by George Cruikshank. Price, $1.00.

The "Gunpowder Plot" was a modest attempt to blow up Parliament, the King and his Counsellors. James of Scotland, then King of England, was weak-minded and extravagant. He hit upon the efficient scheme of extorting money from the people by imposing taxes on the Catholics. In their natural resentment to this extortion, a handful of bold spirits concluded to overthrow the government. Finally the plotters were arrested, and the King put to torture Guy Fawkes and the other prisoners with royal vigor. A very intense love story runs through the entire romance.

TICONDEROGA: A Story of Early Frontier Life in the Mohawk Valley. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four page illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

The setting of the story is decidedly more picturesque than any ever evolved by Cooper: The frontier of New York State, where dwelt an English gentleman, driven from his native home by grief over the loss of his wife, with a son and daughter. Thither, brought by the exigencies of war, comes an English officer, who is readily recognized as that Lord Howe who met his death at Ticonderoga. As a most natural sequence, even amid the hostile demonstrations of both French and Indians, Lord Howe and the young girl find time to make most deliciously sweet love, and the son of the recluse has already lost his heart to the daughter of a great sachem, a dusky maiden whose warrior-father has surrounded her with all the comforts of a civilized life.

The character of Captain Brooks, who voluntarily decides to sacrifice his own life in order to save the son of the Englishman, is not among the least of the attractions of this story, which holds the attention of the reader even to the last page. The tribal laws and folk lore of the different tribes of Indians known as the "Five Nations," with which the story is interspersed, shows that the author gave no small amount of study to the work in question, and nowhere else is it shown more plainly than by the skilful manner in which he has interwoven with his plot the "blood" law, which demands a life for a life, whether it be that of the murderer or one of his race.

A more charming story of mingled love and adventure has never been written than "Ticonderoga."

ROB OF THE BOWL: A Story of the Early Days of Maryland. By John P. Kennedy. Cloth, 12mo. with four page illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

It was while he was a member of Congress from Maryland that the noted statesman wrote this story regarding the early history of his native State, and while some critics are inclined to consider "Horse Shoe Robinson" as the best of his works, it is certain that "Rob of the Bowl" stands at the head of the list as a literary production and an authentic exposition of the manners and customs during Lord Baltimore's rule. The greater portion of the action takes place in St. Mary's—the original capital of the State.

As a series of pictures of early colonial life in Maryland, "Rob of the Bowl" has no equal, and the book, having been written by one who had exceptional facilities for gathering material concerning the individual members of the settlements in and about St. Mary's, is a most valuable addition to the history of the State.

The story is full of splendid action, with a charming love story, and a plot that never loosens the grip of its interest to its last page.

BY BERWEN BANKS. By Allen Raine.

It is a tender and beautiful romance of the idyllic. A charming picture of life in a Welsh seaside village. It is something of a prose-poem, true, tender and graceful.

IN DEFIANCE OF THE KING. A romance of the American Revolution. By Chauncey C. Hotchkiss. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

The story opens in the month of April, 1775, with the provincial troops hurrying to the defense of Lexington and Concord. Mr. Hotchkiss has etched in burning words a story of Yankee bravery and true love that thrills from beginning to end with the spirit of the Revolution. The heart beats quickly, and we feel ourselves taking a part in the exciting scenes described. You lay the book aside with the feeling that you have seen a gloriously true picture of the Revolution. His whole story is so absorbing that you will sit up far into the night to finish it. As a love romance it is charming.